News Framing in Post-Communist Press: Engagement and Control or Disengagement and Powerlessness?

Natalya Ryabinska

Szkoła Nauk Społecznych, Instytutu Filozofii i Socjologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk

Introduction

Discourse of the media remains one of the main factors of continuity and change in political culture of Post-Communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe (Gross 2002). In the conditions of lack of democratic traditions and deficiency of direct experience of democracy there are discursive constructs that people rely on when trying to assign meanings to changing political reality (Kruks 2001, Baysha and Hallahan 2003).

This paper deals with the media impact on involvement of citizens of Eastern and Central European 'young democracies' in the political decision-making a decade after the communist breakdown. What role do the mass media play in public engagement or disengagement? Do they enable citizens to participate in political decisions by bringing the elected representatives to the represented and critically scrutinizing their performance in the office? Do they allow readers and viewers to recognize themselves as potentially active social actors or disqualify them as equal political subjects by making them mere witnesses of political events?

The paper presents the results of my research which purpose was to compare discourse of the media in Post-Communist Ukraine and Poland from the angle of its ability to foster or suppress the formation and activation of people's potential to participate in public life. The main focus of the research was framing of national news in Polish and Ukrainian quality press. The paper introduces the approach of frame analysis applied in the research, describes design of the study and presents its general results.

In the normative models of democracy the media play a number of functions for the political system, one of which is to facilitate civic engagement, to serve as incentives for citizens to become involved in the political process (Norris 2000; Gurevitch and Blumler 1990). Informed debate provided by the media is considered to be the lifeblood of democracies. Without it, citizens and decision-makers are disempowered, lacking the basic tools for informed participation and representation (Rozumilowicz 2002, Stevenson 1995). That is why the media reforms purposed to ensure democratic function of the mass media were among the most urgent tasks of democratic transformations of Eastern and Central European post-communist countries. They started almost

simultaneously in the countries of the region right after the communist breakdown at the end of 1980s.

However, initial effects of media democratization were evaluated by the students of media transformation quite skeptically. Jane Curry in her study of *glasnost* in Soviet Union and media liberalization in Poland concluded that liberalized media instead of creating a sense of involvement and mobilization often produced even greater distance between rulers and the ruled (Curry 1988). The messages the populations actually 'heard' from media content were:

- *The propaganda of power*: the system can do the unthinkable and its subjects are powerless to respond; individuals are ultimately powerless subjects of the system; however widespread the opposition, it cannot change or frighten the leadership; in short: 'We won, you lost, we control'.

- *The propaganda of failure*: the economy is a disaster, workers are immoral and irresponsible, workers and their bosses are ineffective and besotted with social ills, managers and intellectuals are incompetent and corrupt, the system is inefficient and incapable (quoted by: Dahlgren and Sparks 1991)

Similarly, Sergej Kruks (2001) in his investigation of media discourse in Post-communist Latvia showed that the media depicted the emerging Latvian democracy as exclusive matter of the government. Citizens either were not mentioned at all, or considered as secondary actors. Individuals were often treated by the media as victims, witnesses and violators of public order that created the impression that the ordinary people were the main obstacle to democracy, social order, and market economy. Besides, media did not present argumented and rational analysis of the government behaviour which would enable citizens to create public opinion based on objective information and, hence, to engage in purposeful public activity (Kruks 2001).

Did the situation change substantially a decade after the start of media reforms? Do the messages sent by the media of post-communist states contribute to citizens' engagement or disengagement from the political process?

To answer these questions I analysed framing of the national news in the media of Poland and Ukraine in 2003. Interest in the comparison between Ukraine and Poland was called by differences in tempo and scope of democratic transformations in the neighbouring countries, which concerned also the development of civil society. Though far from democratic ideal, civil society in Poland was rather mature, influential and organized, whereas Ukrainian public sector was insufficiently developed, poorly represented in the regions beyond the capital city and overregulated by the government. The main idea of the research was to analyze whether discourses of Ukrainian and Polish media contributed to this difference.

Frames and Framing in the News

The analytical framework used in the study was frame analysis. Frame analysis is an approach which got growing popularity in Media Studies in the last three decades (e.g., Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Callaghan and Schnell 2001; Ferree et. al. 2002). The approach takes its roots in the notion of frame introduced by Ervin Goffman in 1970-s, and his Framing Analysis (Goffman 1974). Goffman defined frames as "schemata of interpretation" that enable individuals to "locate, perceive, identify and label" occurrences within their life space and the world at large and considered frames as the main cognitive tools used by people to organise their experience and social knowledge (Goffman 1974).

News (or media) frames can be compared to lenses through which the political reality is observed. By framing news the media set the parameters in which citizens think and talk about public events. Frame analysis in media research derives from the assumption that media impact comes not only from the information brought to the audience but also (and more importantly) from the way the media organize and package this information. This organisation and packaging is accomplished by means of frames. According to Gitlin, *media frames* are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse" (Gitlin 1980).

The same story can be told in different ways, or within different frames. For example, Gamson and Mogiliani (1989) showed that the issue of nuclear power was presented by the American media in early 1950-s by a 'progress' frame basing on the idea of the society's commitment to technological development and economic growth, whereas in 1970s it was covered, among others, via 'runaway' frame presenting nuclear power as a dangerous monster. Similarly, Baisha and Hallagan (2003) demonstrated that political crisis in Ukraine in 2000-2001 was framed by pro-presidential media via the 'chaos' frame, within which the protest actions were presented as leading to disorganization in the country, chaos, and negative international image, whereas in oppositional media there was used a 'reforming' frame, which considered the crisis as a chance to cure the political system.

How events and issues are packaged and presented by journalists can fundamentally affect how readers and viewers understand those events and issues. This has come to be known as *framing effect* (e.g., Iyengar 1991 Pan and Kosicki 1993). Framing effects are "changes in judgment engendered by subtle alterations in the definition of judgment or choice of the problems" (Iyengar 1987, 816). Experiments, conducted by the specialists in communication studies, inspired by the results of framing research in cognitive psychology (in particular, Kahneman and Tversky 1984), showed that alternative journalistic news frames, applied to the same issue, could alter the way the reader or viewer contemplated the issue and formed opinion about it (Iyengar 1991, Price et al. 1997, de Vreese 2003).

Among most notable of these studies there was a series of experiments of Shanto Iyengar (1991), who examined the impact of news framing on the ways people ascribe responsibility for social, economic and political conditions. He showed that social problems, such as poverty, unemployment or AIDS can be presented by the media via two different frames: episodic frame and thematic frame. The news story, using *episodic* frame, focuses on a single episode or occurrence, such as a story of the poor woman on welfare. The people exposed to this type of framing tend to make individual attributions of responsibility (e.g., the poor woman is herself responsible for her poverty). The other frame, introduced by Iyengar, was *thematic* frame. The articles, writing about social problems via the thematic frame speak about social problems in terms of the larger historical context. Iyengar demonstrated that under the influence of this type of framing the audience was more inclined to make systemic attribution of responsibility (e.g., poverty is due to institutional conditions).

Frame analysts differentiate between *common* and *issue-specific* frames. I*ssue-specific* frames are employed exclusively for certain themes and issues. The classic example of the study of issue-specific frames is Gamson&Modigliami's research on framing nuclear power in media discourse (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Common frames transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics. They occur widely in different types of news, news issues and media outlets.

Common News Frames. Responsibility and Powerlessness Frames

Studies in news framing identified a handful of common frames widely used in the media for presentation and interpretation of national and foreign matters. They showed that although it is conceivable that journalists can use a multitude of ways to frame the news, there are the following common frames that largely account for all the ways of approaching news: *conflict*, *economic consequences*, *human impact*, *responsibility*, *morality* and *powerlessness* frames. Correspondingly, journalists frame news in one of the following ways: (a) by emphasizing conflict between parties or individuals; (b) by focusing on economic consequences for the audiences; (c) by focusing on individual as the example; (d) by attributing responsibility to political institutions or individuals; (d) by putting issues in the context of moral values; e) by presenting events and issues as being fully settled by a relatively distant powerful elite or some other forces inaccessible for control or influence of citizenry.

Some studies of media frames focused on the impact of one or several of the mentioned common frames on audiences (Valkenburg et al. 1999, Capella and Jamieson 1997, Iyengar 1991, Neuman et al. 1992, Graber 1988, Patterson 1993, Price et al. 1997, de Vreese 2003). Basing on the results of these investigations, two common frames were chosen for the present research, aimed at the comparison of the media impact on civic engagement. These were the frames having a distinguished positive or negative impact on engagement: the responsibility frame and the powerlessness frame.

The **responsibility frame** *presents an issue or problem in a way as to attribute responsibility for causing or solving the issue to either the government or to an individual or a group.* News coverage in terms of the attribution of responsibility assists readers and viewers in seeing the link between governmental actions (or inactions) and social problems. And vice versa, non-attribution of responsibility or attribution of responsibility to individuals or groups in the society (e.g., people are responsible for their poverty) imparts rather topical and disorganised understanding of public affairs, instead of general one.

According to Iyengar (1991), news coverage which inclines audience to assign responsibility for national issues to wider social forces and not to limit oneself with individual level explanations of social problems furthers electoral accountability. "If voters fail to attribute responsibility to their leaders, elective officials have no incentive to address difficult issues and may with impunity substitute slogans and aphorisms for programs and arguments" (Iyengar 1991,141).

The news framed in terms of attribution of responsibility assist readers and viewers in seeing the connection between government conduct and social problems. It conditions thus the ability of citizenry to exercise control over the actions of their elected representatives. Presentation of news through the framework of attribution of responsibility imposes socially active role on the reader/hearer/viewer. It joins him to the public which critically supervises the work of the government and forms public opinion which has a potential to influence power decisions (Iyengar 1991). Besides, it enhances public interest to politics and contributes to formation of more informed and aware voters.

The **powerlessness frame** *is the attribute of the stories where the locus of control of an issue is out of site, in the hands of "powerful others" or simply not possible to identify.* In a sense, it equals to non-attribution of responsibility.

Powerlessness frame portrays people as victims of powerful social forces. It is the attribute of the stories where locus of control of an issue lies outside individual or his social group. News stories that use powerlessness frame may implicate that locus of control is in the hands of "wealthy and well-connected" or some other "powerful others" simultaneously leaving it unclear who these 'powerful others' are. The other option is to present an issue as being controlled by the government or some other political actors, showing at the same time that people have no chances to influence his/her decisions.

In the case of framing of political news stories by the powerlessness frame the media leave the political actors responsible for the social problems out of sigh, present them as uncontrollable force or as the agents unable to cope with problems. They also bring no understanding which levels of government have the ability to alleviate the problems. The news coverage via the powerlessness frame creates a sense of helplessness against urgent social problems and powerlessness against dominant groups (Neuman et al. 1992, Just et al. 1998). It makes readers/viewers passive subjects of the political

process unable to control the actions of power holders or competently deliberate on the ways of solving social problems.

Identifying frames in the news

There are two general approaches for measurement frames in the news: *inductive* and *deductive* (de Vreese 2003). The inductive approach to news frames "involves analyzing of a news story with an open view to attempt to reveal the array of possible frames [embedded in that story]. This approach can detect the many possible ways in which an issue can be framed" (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000, 94). Investigations made within the inductive approach are often criticized for relying on too a small sample and being difficult to replicate. They also give little space for generalization and comparison. The generic approach to news frames "involves predefining certain frames as content analytic variables to verify the extent to which these frames occur in the news" (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000, 94). The benefit of the deductive approach is that it allows for examination of general features of news reporting beyond the issue-specific limits. It brings more possibilities than the inductive approach for comparative, cross-country and longitudinal research (Nickels 2005).

When facing the task of identifying frames in the news, the relevant question is: *what* (which components) in a news story constitutes a frame? According to Entman (1993), frames in the news can be examined and identified by "the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts and judgments". Shah et al. (2002, 367) added to this list also "choices about language, quotations and relevant information". Gamson and Lash (1983, 399) pointed at metaphors, catchphrases, exemplars (i.e., historical examples from which lessons are drawn), depictions and visual images (e.g., icons) as the devices which create frame. These and other characteristics and elements of news stories, called collectively *framing devices,* are the focal points for the empirical measurement of frames in the news.

Design of the study

This study focused on the media, which are the main agents shaping people's understanding of political reality in post-communist countries, with particular attention to their mobilizing function. The main task of the research was to compare discourse of the media in the post-communist Ukraine and Poland in regard to their ability to foster or suppress the formation and activation of people's potential to participate in public life. This was realized via comparative analysis of the use of the two common news frames, which have a distinguished positive or negative impact on engagement (the responsibility and powerlessness frames), in the Ukrainian and Polish news coverage. The main questions guiding this part of the study were:

RQ1: Does the use of the responsibility frame vary significantly by country?

RQ2: Does the use of the powerlessness frame vary significantly by country?

Qualitative and quantitative frame analysis. Comparative analysis of news framing in Poland and Ukraine allowed investigating the mechanisms with the help of which the media shape civic engagement in these countries. This analysis included quantitative evaluation of visibility of the responsibility and powerlessness frames in the news coverage of Poland and Ukraine. In addition, it included qualitative analysis of typical features of these frames in the news of both countries. Separate task of the qualitative analysis was to define the frame-carrying elements of the news stories responsible for framing the news items in "engaging" or "disengaging" manner. With this purpose the study tracked the following features of the news:

- Content details, including the main subjects, actors, and references;
- Comprehensiveness, including availability of background information on political actors and topics under discussion;

Moreover, the study analyzed the following components of the news stories usually serving as framing devices (Tankard 2001):

- Headlines and kickers (small headlines over the main headlines);
- Subheads;
- Leads (the beginnings of news stories);
- Selection of sources and affiliations;
- Selection of quotes;
- Pull quotes (quotes that are blown up in size for emphasis);
- Concluding statements or paragraphs of articles1;

In addition to framing devices listed by Tankard (2001), the attention was paid to several other items commonly considered as basic framing mechanisms:

- Metaphors and other tools used for rhetorical purposes: epithets, imagery, sentence structure (syntax);
- Choice of language;
- Stylistic choices;
- Choices of relevant information;
- Numbers;

---

[1] This list of framing devices in composed on the basis of: Tankard (2001). I excluded from the Tankard's list photographs, photo captions and logos because the analysis of visual images was not included in the research.

Data for the study. Data for the research was taken from the Polish and Ukrainian quality press. The reason why the quality press had been chosen as a material for investigation on media and engagement was the fact that the quality press addresses potentially most politically active part of a society: those educated, professionally active and with income which is average or above average. News was analyzed for the period from 1 January 2003 to 31 September 2003. I chose this period because it was a time relatively free from elections and electoral campaigns, which are commonly accompanied with pre-electoral rhetoric in the media, characterised by an artificial increase of attention to the issues of political accountability and responsibility.

Newspaper choice. From the Polish side two most readable opinion-forming newspapers were chosen: Rzeczpospolita and Gazeta Wyborcza.

Gazeta Wyborcza (GW)

Despite the fact that Gazeta Wyborcza is printed in tabloid format, it is undoubtedly a quality daily; in 2003 it had a circulation of about 540.000 copies and was one of the leaders of the Polish newspaper market. Gazeta Wyborcza is in the lead amongst the opinion-forming Polish media recognized for its quality journalism. The newspaper is known for its liberal/liberal democratic orientation, different from rivalling quality newspaper Rzeczpospolita which has a moderate conservative profile.

Rzeczpospolita (RZ)

Rzeczpospolita, printed in broad shit format, maintains more elitist and "deadpan" image than Gazeta Wyborcza and is arguably compared to that of *The Times* in Britain. Its circulation in 2003 was about 250.000 copies and it had 4-th wide readership among Polish national dailies. Due to the supplements on economy/market and law, the newspaper is widely read by business people, managers and administrators. Both Gazeta Wyborcza (GW) and Rzeczpospolita (RZ) are privately owned, the first one – by the biggest Polish media corporation Agora, the second – by Norwegian company Orkla Media[2].

Den' and Dzerkalo Tyzhnia (DzT)

---

[2] In 2003 51% Rzeczpospolita shares were owned by Orkla Media and 49% by the Polish government.

Due to the fact that the sector of quality media in Ukraine is poorly developed, there was a problem of finding full-sense quality dailies among Ukrainian newspapers. The newspapers chosen for the research (the daily *Den'* and the weekly *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*), though they are far from classic quality newspapers such as British *The Times* or American *Washington Post*, are profoundly different from the majority of Ukrainian nation-wide printed outlets which are of pronounced tabloid character. These broadsheets publish a large number of articles devoted to political, economical and social issues and offer political analysis, exclusive interviews and opinion. Their circulation is rather limited (the print-out of Den' is 51,000 copies, that of Dzerkalo Tyzhnia is about 30,000 copies) but these newspapers were and still are rather influential in Ukraine, especially among educated people and the political establishment. These publications are often quoted and referred to by other mass media, including local media in different regions. Both are privately owned.

Choice of news stories. In order to find the answers for research questions RQ1 and RQ2, content analysis of national issues and events framing in Polish *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* and Ukrainian *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia* and *Den'* had been carried out. In total 508 news stories were analyzed - 114 from DzT, 123 from Den', 163 from GW and 108 from RZ. A news story was the unit of analysis. There were coded all the news stories on domestic affairs on front page and inside the newspapers. The following topics were excluded from the research:

- Sports;
- Church;
- Culture (except cultural policy);
- Economy and law (except budget, taxation, land redistribution, privatization).

Sports news and cultural reviews were excluded from the analysis because they do not deal with societal problems and therefore hardly can be helpful in defining responsibility or control of political decision-makers. Considerable share of articles from Polish newspaper supplements on law and economy were not considered as well because of their narrow focus and specialized character. Present study did not take into account the news stories on the matters of Church and religion. Stories on purely political issues (political alliances, coalitions, government formulas) dealing with 'instrumental' side of politics and not including references to policy issues were also left out. By policy issues I understand here the matters which include the concrete problems on which it is necessary to make political decisions (pollution, taxes, unemployment, poverty, etc.)[3].

Measurement of frames. To measure the visibility of the responsibility and powerlessness frames in Polish and Ukrainian news the approach developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) with multi-term scales for the measurement of each frame had been applied. The responsibility frame

---

[3] The definitions of political and policy issues in the news are taken from: Mancini (1991).

was operationalized with four items designed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) (see Table 1). For powerlessness frame which had never been operationalized in the previous research[4] a set of measuring questions had been devised matching the purpose of present study (Table 1).

Table 1. FRAMING ITEMS

Attribution of responsibility
1. Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?
2. Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?
3. Does the story suggest the solution(s) to the problem/issue?
4. Does the story suggest that an individual (or group of people in a society) is responsible for the issue-problem? (item was inversely coded)
Powerlessness
1. Does the story suggest that the agent responsible for the issue is out of sight or impossible to identify?
2. Does the story suggest that the agent responsible for the problem is "powerful other" beyond the reach of people's control?
3. Does the story suggest that the agent responsible for the problem is powerless to solve or alleviate it?
4. Does the story suggest that at present there is no solution for the problem?
5. Does the story contain expressive adjectives, metaphors and other rhetorical devices that might generate feelings of helplessness, despair, outrage?

In the process of coding all the questions from the "responsibility set" and "powerlessness set" were applied to every news story under analysis. As responsibility and powerlessness frames are not mutually exclusive, one single article could contain both of the frames.

The coding questions were answered with yes (1) or no (0). For each of the two frames, scales were formed by adding the scores of each item and dividing it by the number of items. Thus, the values of each framing scale ranged from .00 (frame not present) to 1.00 (frame present). A high score of the attribution of responsibility scale showed that the story suggests that some level of government

---

[4] The studies of Neuman et al. (1992) and Just et al. (1998) dealing with the measurement of powerlessness frame in the content of news, did not provide a description of the measures applied for assessment and comparison of framing the issues in terms of powerlessness.

has the ability to alleviate, or is responsible for causing, a certain issue or problem. A high score of the powerlessness frame showed that the story suggests that the locus of control of an issue is out of sight, in the hands of a powerless responsible agent or under the command of some "wealthy and well-connected" inaccessible for the control of the public.

Results

Responsibility frame

The results of the content analysis of the frames used in Polish and Ukrainian quality press in 2003 the Polish newspapers more often than the Ukrainian ones presented national issues and events through the responsibility frame. The mean scores of visibility of the responsibility frame in Polish GW (0.63) and RZ (0.69) apparently exceed that for Ukrainian Den' (0.39), and are also higher than the corresponding rate for DzT (0.55) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mean scores of visibility of the responsibility frame in Ukrainian and Polish quality newspapers.

Outlet	Mean score
DzT	0.55 (0.25)
Den'	0.39 (0.26)
Average (Ukraine)	0.47 (0.27) (n=237)
Rz	0.69 (0.28)
GW	0.63 (0.28)
Average (Poland)	0.65 (0.28) (n=271)

Note. Data entries are mean scores on the frame scales, figures in parentheses indicate standard deviations and number of cases.

Polish newspapers more often made the process and agents of policy-making visible and explicable to the public and analysed the conduct of different levels of government via the prism of propriety and efficiency of government conduct. Biggest part of the Polish news stories was concentrated on current activities of policy makers and performance of state institutions. This reporting was made with regard to the consequences these decisions had for the society. Polish articles were predominantly devoted to the coverage of the conduct of public agencies and officials. The stories, especially in GW, envisaged the impact of the government decisions on people's daily lives. Polish newspapers analyzed the bills and amendments discussed in the Parliament, showed
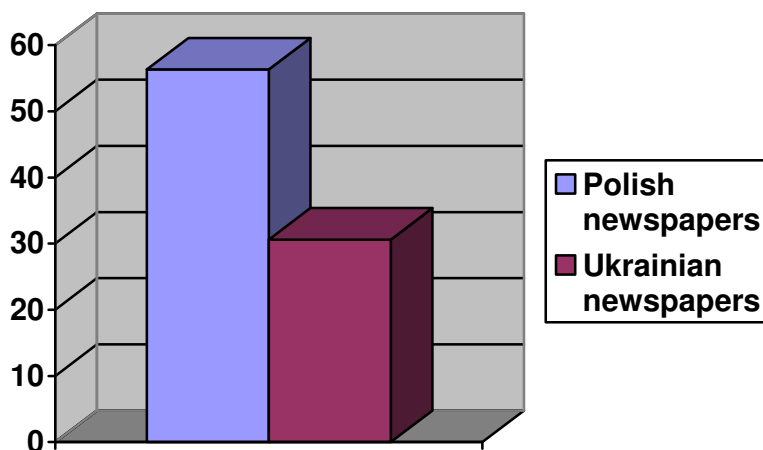
probable and actual consequences of the decisions made by the Parliament and the Government, commented on the appointment of state officials, disclosed shortcomings in the functioning of state institutions, investigated the cases of mismanagement and misconduct among the power authorities. The agents responsible for problems or able to alleviate them were clearly named and their role in decision-and policy-making coherently described.

Ukrainian newspapers, in contrast to Polish, paid major attention to exposition and analysis of societal problems, such as, for example, pollution, deterioration of urban planning, worsening of the public health service, pauperization of countrymen, improper functioning of municipal service, etc. A common feature of these problems-oriented stories was *shortage of references to the responsible agents and their conduct.* Ukrainian news stories concentrated on impressive problems description, search of problems roots, explanation of problems history and development. At the same time the agents responsible for decision making related to the problems were mentioned (if ever) only occasionally. Substantial part of the news stories never contained references to the agents responsible for the decision- and policy-making related to the problems. Part of the articles mentioned some governmental bodies, state agencies, statesmen or politicians. However, these references did not enable understanding which particular role did these agents play in the decision-making over the problems, what concrete actions did they realize and what were the consequences of these actions for the improvement (or aggravation) of the state of the problems. The references were rather superficial and did not bring understanding, who in Ukrainian politics was responsible for decision-making related to the problems, and which particular decisions of the responsible agents influenced the state of the problems and how.

In Ukrainian newspapers the visibility of the agents responsible for political decision-making was lower than in Polish news outlets (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Percentage of news stories with visible responsibility agent[5]

---

[5] Percentage of news stories with visible responsibility agent was defined as a percent of news stories which showed which level of government was responsible for issue or problem or had an ability to alleviate it

For example, in case of the coverage of Parliamentary debates the Ukrainian newspapers focused mainly on the essence of the debates but were quite unclear about the political actors (politicians, parties, interest groups) which adhered or opposed the presented stances. The journalists showed certain negligence as to informing the audience who was advocating what during the decision-making in the Parliament. They did not inform who was speaking in favor or against the debated bills, never showed how different groups voted in the Parliament.

Ex. **DzT** Natalya Jacenko "**Is it our last one? For the third time the Supreme Council became concerned with a law on non-government pension provision**".

I have to apologize to several dozens of representatives of the deputy corps, who know the issue of retirement schemes inside-out, certainly much better than the author of these lines does. Yet, the experts prefer not to get involved into populist discussions – just as the representatives of the Cabinet of Ministers, who try to look at what is happening with the detachment of the doomed. To take part in a discussion means to be exposed to a storm of emotions, since the opponents make up for the unsteadiness of their fantasies by strong adherence to their convictions and even aggressiveness.

(*„**Это и есть наш последний? Верховная рада в третий раз озаботилась законом о негосударственном пенсионном обеспечении**"*

Я сразу прошу прощения у тех нескольких десятков представителей депутатского корпуса, которые на пенсионных проблемах «собаку съели» и знают их получше автора этих строк. Однако в популистские дискуссии знатоки предпочитают не ввязываться — как и представители Кабинета министров, они воспринимают происходящее с отрешенностью обреченных. Дискутировать — значит подвергаться шквалу негативных эмоций, ведь зыбкость своих фантазий оппоненты, как правило, компенсируют убежденностью в собственной правоте и даже агрессивностью.

Comment: Typical to coverage of Parliamentary debates in DzT, the author of the story does not give names or party affiliations of major opponents of the pension reform debate. Instead, she uses imprecise definitions: "several dozens of representatives of deputy corps…" and "opponents". The readers remain uninformed what political groups or factions stand behind these wording

While Ukrainian news stories commonly avoided clear naming of the officials or institutions responsible for causing the problems or their treatment, Polish reportages and commentaries as a rule clearly identified responsible agents and described their roles in the decision- and policy making. For example, both GW and RZ clearly showed which party (or coalition) was advocating what during Parliamentary debates, what interests were supported by whom during decision-making.

Ex.1: **GW** 17/01 Gospodarka Dariusz Malinowski, Marcin Musiał, Ewa Gołdecka. "**The President of Drivers?**".

The Law [on bio-fuels] Evokes Many Controversies…

The law in present version is defended by PSL (the agrarian party) and farmers' unions. According to them, there is no danger for engines; bio-fuels will be beneficial for the environment and will create thousands of work places.

*("**The President of Drivers?**").*

Ustawa [o biopaliwach] budzi ogromne kontrowersje...

Ustawy w obecnej wersji bronią PSL i kółka rolnicze. Według nich niebezpieczeństwa dla silników nie ma, biopaliwa będą korzystne dla środowiska i pozwolą stworzyć kilkadziesiąt tysięcy miejsc pracy.

What made the responsibility frame less visible in the Ukrainian news stories as compared to the Polish ones were not only the lower visibility of the responsible agents and lesser attention to the conduct of policy-makers, but also lack of *clarity and comprehensiveness* in the coverage of issues and events. With the exception of several cases, Polish journalists brought a comprehensible picture of the conduct of the authorities. The content and form of the reports and commentaries provided by GW and RZ was adequate to enable understanding of WHO (which department, institution or official engaged in policy making)-DID WHAT- AND WITH WHICH CONSEQUENCES. Polish reporters not only brought the news on the current decisions made by the responsible decision-makers but also contextualized the news with the help of background information. Additional information on the history of the issues, similar events in the past, responsibilities of the officials and agencies engaged in the events helped to understand the events and put them in wider socio-political, historical or economic context. The reports about events and issues were supplied also with explanations and commentaries. Events and issues were commented on in GW and RZ by politicians, civil servants, experts, non-governmental organizations, newspapers' commentators and others. The commentators evaluated propriety and efficiency of government actions presented in news stories, predicted their possible consequences, and explained what each political decision meant for the average citizens. This made

news more understandable and appealing to audiences and enabled readers to get greater competence in public debates and better ability to critically evaluate their elected representatives.

In Ukrainian newspapers, especially Den', background data, explanations and commentaries were not a necessary part of news coverage. Den' introduced the majority of official events (meetings, conferences, official statements and declarations) with the help of short or medium-size articles based on official press-releases. These articles consisted predominantly of the quotations from official speeches and statements or thorough retelling of official press releases. At the same time they did not provide background information or explanation crucial for understanding the meaning of the presented events to an average citizen.

Yet another attribute of news stories presented in Den' and DzT which stipulated their lower comprehensiveness compared to the Polish GW and RZ was the way the information was organized in the newspaper's space. Both GW and RZ practiced so-called "ensemble" way of organizing news when a single event or issue was presented by more than one article. This allowed to give a multi-dimensional coverage of an event (reportage, commentary, relevant statistics, and biographies of people involved, historical context, etc.). Besides, the information inside a single news story was also organized in a way enhancing comprehension: additional background data (historical notes, biographic profiles, expert opinions, interviews with participants) were placed in separate 'windows', thus forming information subunits easy to perceive and understand. This 'readers-friendly' way of placing information in the Polish dailies contrasted with the Ukrainian newspaper practices. Den' more rarely, than RZ and GW, devoted to events and issues more than one news story. As a rule this story was based on a single information source (governmental backgrounder, interview or opinion of an expert) and lacked supplementary information, in particular background information on the topic under consideration and political actors involved. As for DzT, it proposed a much wider spectrum of information and commonly supplied coverage of an event with historical references, statistics and analysis. However, this diverse data were fused in one lengthy homogeneous text with no 'highlighting' of background data, no underline of main ideas, no catchphrases or other methods of facilitating perception and understanding.

Availability of detailed information about political decision-making and its agents, its contextualization with the help of background information, explanations and commentaries and also the "ensemble" way of organising news were the factors that gave the readers of the Polish quality dailies more chances, than got the audiences of the Ukrainian newspapers, to acquire comprehensive and multidimensional picture of events necessary to critically evaluate the performance of their elected representatives and competently participate in the decision-making process.

The next aspect of news framing which contributed to lesser visibility of responsibility frame in Ukrainian news was *attribution of responsibility for social problems to individuals or societal*

groups. In Ukrainian newspapers the share of news stories where responsibility for the problems was attributed to ordinary citizens was more than twice bigger than in the Polish outlets.

The groups commonly accused of causing or aggravating the problems were for example, grain traders; representatives of shadow business; common people contaminating natural environment; TV-makers which filled TV schedule with low-quality production and advertisement; pseudo-patriots disseminating negative image of Ukraine abroad, etc. Typical example was the media coverage of the crops failure and subsequent price boost in summer-2003, which called mass accusations of farmers and grain traders by the politicians and the media:

Ex. 1: **DzT**, 6/06 "**The Crops We Are Going to Gather Will Not Suffice even for Sowing**".

The farmers who sowed properly, with care for additional protection and nutrition of plants, managed to preserve the crops. Others stopped thinking what field used to fit better what crops long time ago. Plenty of farms have sowed without preliminary fertilizing. And when nature displayed its severe temper, all the flaws became apparent.

*("**Того, что мы соберем, не хватит даже на семена**…"*

Те, кто сеял по науке, заботясь о дополнительной защите и питании растений, сохранили посевы практически до единого гектара. Остальные же давно перестали думать, на каком поле лучше сеять и какая культура прежде там росла. Масса хозяйств сеяла без внесения удобрений. И когда природа проявила крутой нрав, все огрехи вылезли.)

Ex. 2:. **Den'**, 27/03 "**Crop Market: Opinions of Victims**"

The grain traders manipulated with low prices on the internal market and bought crops for 300 UAH. Then they sold it abroad at for 600 UAH and in addition got the VAT back. Now they are happy of superprofits at the expense of the grain producers.

*("**Зерновой рынок: взгляд потерпевших**"*

Зернотрейдеры, сманипулировав низкими ценами на внутреннем рынке, скупили зерно по 300 грн., а за границу вывезли по 600 грн. и еще получили возврат НДС, и радуются сверхприбылям за счет убытков зернопроизводителей)

Often journalists sought the causes of different societal problems in "mentality", "consciousness", "complexes" of people. The "national features", mentioned in Ukrainian newspapers as causes of societal problems, were, for example "syndrome of little Russia with accompanying inferiority complex", "slavish obedience", "lack of fighting qualities" and the like. The society was presented in the Ukrainian newspapers as apathetic, weak and unable to engage in the discussion of social problems and their solution. Differently from the Ukrainian journalists, their Polish colleagues, rarely attributed responsibility for problems to the "complexes" or "mentality" of the nation. On the contrary, the Polish columnists assessed the society as being more "healthy" and "sober-minded", than the politicians racing for power:

Ex. RZ 1/03 "**The Time of Civil Disobedience?**"

…[the society] is sensible, educated, polished and would like to understand what is being said to it, what is being suggested and how these statements and promises relate to the reality.

(„Czas obywatelskiego nieposłusheństwa?”

…[społeczeństwo] jest rozsądne, wykształcone, otrzaskane i chciałoby zrozumieć, co się do niego mówi,   co się mu proponuje i jak zarówno tę wypowiedzi, jak i obiętnice mają do rzeczywistości).

Powerlessness frame

The results of the content analysis showed that framing of national news in Ukraine differed from the Polish news framing by an excessive use of the powerlessness frame. The mean scores of visibility of powerlessness frame were 0.25 for Ukrainian and 0.14 for Polish newspapers (see Table 2).

Table 2. Mean scores of visibility of the powerlessness frame in the Ukrainian and Polish quality newspapers.

Outlet	Mean score
DzT	0.25 (0.24)
Den'	0.25 (0.23)
Average (Ukraine)	0.25 (0.24) (n=237)
Rz	0.17 (0.19)
GW	0.11 (0.20)
Average (Poland)	0.14 (0.20) (n=271)

Note. Data entries are mean scores on the frame scales, figures in parentheses indicate standard deviations and number of cases.

In the Ukrainian newspapers the powerlessness frame most often manifested itself in the emotional narratives about pressing social problems combined with non-attribution of responsibility for causing and solving the problems. These stories typically presented the locus of control of the issues as lying beyond the access of average citizens, in the hands of uncontrollable forces or faceless "*authorities,*" "*elites,*" or "*Ukrainian politicum* " - some generalized or unclear agents which couldn't be recognized and, consequently, scrutinized and controlled by the public. The language of the Ukrainian newspapers was rich in the language devices that made it impossible for readers to identify the agents responsible for the issues. The usual devices used in Ukrainian news stories were

nominalizations and **passivization**[6]. They permitted the journalists to speak about the drawbacks of governance without mentioning the names of the committers of erroneous actions:

Ex. 1: **Den**' 2/07 "**Agiotage Which Is Not Sweet**"

According to the opinion of the Ukrainian Academy of Agrarian Sciences and Ministry of Agrarian Policy ..granting of access of raw sugar cane to Ukrainian market on request by World Trade Organization may have negative consequences for domestic sugar branch.

("Несладкий ажиотаж"

…по заключению Украинской Академии аграрных наук … обеспечение по требованию ВТО доступа на украинский рынок тростникового сахара-сырца может иметь негативные экономические и социальные последствия для отечественной сахарной отрасли)

Comment: From this sentence one can not figure out who took the decision to grant access of raw sugar cane to Ukrainian market, because the nominalization "*granting*" permits to conceal the causing agent and shows only the result of the decision ("*granting of access of raw sugar cane to Ukrainian market*", which caused *"negative consequences for domestic sugar branch"*).

Ex. 2: **Den'** 22/2 "**The System for the Sake of the System**"

…the data for February indicates that tuberculosis and cancer programs were practically not funded. The centers of AIDS prevention are being opened in the cities where the number of the HIV infection cases is one or two…Budget funds are getting dispersed and it is difficult to find the ends.

("Система ради системы"

…по данным на февраль, туберкулезные и онкологические программы практически не финансировались. Центры профилактики ВИЧ/СПИДа открываются в городах, где зафиксировано не более двух-трех больных… Бюджетные деньги распыляются, и концы найти крайне сложно)

Comment: After reading this fragment built on passive constructions one remains unaware, who did not fund tuberculosis and cancer programs, who opened AIDS prevention centers in the areas where they were unnecessary, and who wasted the budget funds.

---

6 *Nominalizations* occur when sentences or parts of sentences, descriptions of actions and the participants involved in them, are turned into nouns. They help to impersonalise actions, to eliminate agency, to transform processes into objects. In the following example the nominalization is used to 'hide' the agents of unpopular measures undertaken by government and to represent the whole case as something necessary and inevitable: *The raising of taxes is being dictated by circumstances.*

Passivization is rendering of verbs in the passive form, it also obscures the agency and focuses the attention of the reader on certain themes at the expense of others. In the phrase: *Demonstrators were stopped by the police* the attention is focused on the demonstrators, not the police, opposite to the sentence: *The police stopped demonstrators.* In addition, the passive constructions permit to remove reference to the causing agent, for ex.: *Demonstrators were stopped.*

The other language tool widely used in the Ukrainian newspapers were **unclear names** which also made it impossible to identify the agents in charge, and, hence, put the locus of control over the issues out of sight of the public. Such vague names as *"files of feudal–mafiosi groups", "certain agency which tried to legally conduct quiet privatization of the state property", "vertically integrated groups who created the chain 'coal-coke-metal'*, *"certain influential commercial enterprise"* not only concealed the agents managing the issues, but also let the readers assume that they were powerful and influential - so-called 'powerful others' – the persons (organizations) who controlled the events but in no way could be controlled by citizenry.

Polish news coverage contained much less "powerlessness" stories where the responsible agent was absent or unclear (they constituted only about 25% of all the Polish news stories with more than average visibility of the powerlessness frame, whereas the corresponding number for the Ukrainian press was 61%)[7]. As a rule even if news stories pictured complex situations with no evident problems' solutions the agents which bore responsibility for the issues or had power to alleviate them were shown to the public. As a result the stories were framed simultaneously in terms of attribution of responsibility and powerlessness.
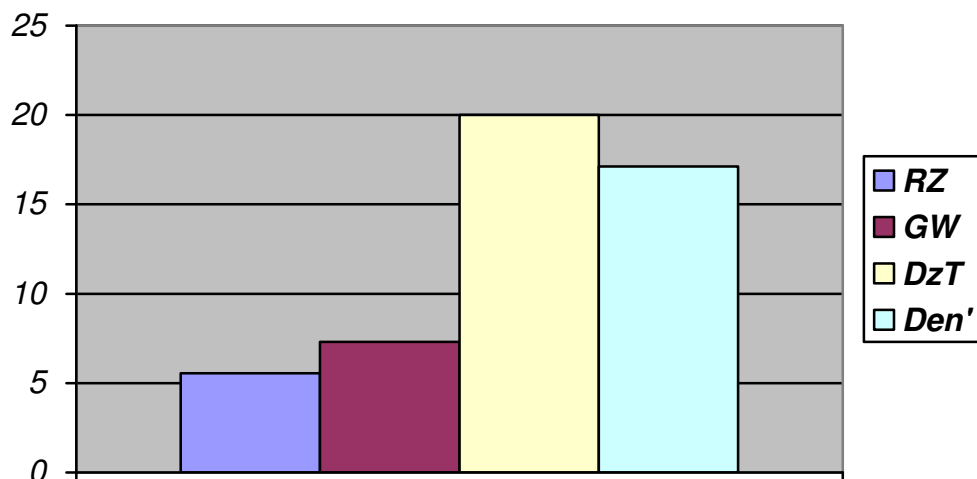
Typical for Ukrainian newspapers was a so-called "point-and-weep" story where a desperate picture of some key social problem (pollution, homelessness, poverty) was presented in an emotional and expressive manner; the story however, did not contain information on the ways of problem alleviation. Stories of the kind were rather persuasive in describing horrible state of the problem (which could be illustrated by the headlines: *"Requiem for a Grove", "Else's Blood. Human Tragedy in Three Acts", "Sink of Iniquity", "We Confidently Step…to New Catastrophes*?"). At the same time lack of the analysis of what has been done by responsible agents regarding the problem and what could have been done for improvement produced a sense of powerlessness and lack of control.

The sense of helplessness against the state of vital problems was reinforced by the use of persuasive rhetoric, including metaphors and epithets (for ex., *'incurable soil injuries'*, *'half-dead animals', 'monstrous constructions'*), and depressing imagery. Often impressive metaphors and comparisons were used in headlines and subheads of Ukrainian news stories (E.g., *"Mausoleum of Agrarian Reforms", "Sink of Iniquity", "Armageddon for the Crops"*).

In the Polish quality dailies the expressive rhetoric accompanying framing in terms of powerlessness was less common (see Fig. 2).

---

[7] The news stories with more than average visibility of the powerlessness frame were defined as the news stories with the mean score of visibility of the powerlessness frame more than 0.4.

Fig. 2. Percentage of news stories containing expressive adjectives, metaphors and other rhetorical devices that might generate feelings of helplessness, despair, outrage.

Polish quality newspapers spoke about domestic news mostly in a neutral tone. Emotional language with bright metaphors serving to attract public attention to current problems was used in case of extraordinary events, such as big corruption scandals and cases of illegal or inadequate conduct of high-ranking officials. Persuasive rhetoric, if used in the Polish news stories, occurred as a rule in the speeches of politicians, public figures or renowned publicists, but was not usual for the style of reports and commentaries written by journalists. When highlighting social problems, Polish newspapers concentrated more on investigating the activities of decision- and policy-makers related to the issue and searching for alternative solutions. In contrast, Ukrainian newspapers focused on attracting wide public attention to the problems and voicing people's frustration about them.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to compare discourse of the media in Post-Communist Ukraine and Poland from the angle of its potential impact on civic engagement. The results showed that the Polish quality newspapers more often than the Ukrainian ones framed the news in terms of the responsibility frame, which has a potential for stimulating citizens to analyze political reality, raises public awareness of public officials' accountability and empowers readers for the exercise of civic control. At the same time the Ukrainian newspapers more often presented events and issues via the powerlessness frame, which casts for the readers the only roles of witnesses or victims of powerful social forces.

Substantive difference in the usage of the responsibility frame in Polish and Ukrainian press can be explained first of all by a bigger scale of media autonomy and independence which characterized Poland in comparison to Ukraine in 2003. Different from Polish national dailies which were already successful and competitive enterprises financially independent from the state, Ukrainian newspapers were unable to exist without sponsorship from the state or the political-financial groups. Besides, the year 2003, the last but one in the presidency of Leonid Kuchma, was characterised by the diverse practices applied by the power to control state-owned and also private media[8]. The other reasons were greater access of Polish journalists to the information about the performance of state institutions conditioned by much bigger, than in Ukraine, transparency and openness of the government; better legal protection of the right to collect and spread information; and better economic condition of the Polish press enabling its ability to afford thorough and competent news gathering and reporting.

One more possible reason of difference in the usage of the responsibility and powerlessness frames in Polish and Ukrainian news is different standard of journalism which currently characterizes the media of the former Soviet countries as compared to some of the post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe. Different from the Polish media which steadily move to the Western model of fact-based journalism, the Ukrainian media continue to practice the advocative opinion-driven journalism led by political attitudes or ideological stances. Ukrainian journalists concentrate more on expressing their opinion and persuading the audiences, different from their Polish colleagues who pay main attention to bringing the facts about the performance of power holders and the analysis of these facts from the perspective of public interest.

Bibliography

Baysha, O., and Hallahan, K. 2003. Media Framing of the Ukrainian Political Crisis, 2000-2001.
      *Journalism Studies 5(2):*233-246.

Callaghan, K, and Schnell, F. 2001. Assessing the democratic debate: how the news media frame elite
      policy discourse. *Political Communication* 18: 183-212.

Capella, J.N. and Jamieson, K.H. 1997. *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New
      York: Oxford University Press

Curry, J. 1988. *Glasnost: Words Spoken and Words Heard*. Paper prepared for the Kennan Institute,
      'The Gorbachev Reform Program', 20-22 March, mimeo.

---

[8] The most notorious of these practices was the use of so-called 'temnyky', the unsigned secret instructions that were regularly sent by the presidential administration to major state-controlled and private media outlets to tell journalists on what issues they were to report during a particular week and in what manner.

Dahlgren, P., Sparks, C., eds. 1991. *Communication and Citizenship*. London: Routledge.

de Vreese, C. 2003. *Framing Europe: Television News and European Integration*. Amsterdam: Aksant Publishers.

Entman, R. (1993) Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *Journal of Communication* 43(4): 51-58

Ferree et al. 2002. *Shaping Abortion Discourse Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gamson, W.A. and Lash, K. 1983. The political culture of social welfare policy. In S. Shimon, E.Yutchman-Yaar, eds. *Evaluating the welfare state: Social and political perspectives*, 397-415. New York: Academic Press.

Gamson, W.A., and Modigliani, A. 1989. Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructivist Approach. *American Journal of Sociology* 1:1-37.

Gitlin, T. 1980. *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Goffman, E. 1974. *Framing Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

Graber, D. 1988. *Processing the news: how people tame the information tide*. New York: Longman.

Gross, P. 2002. *Entangled Evolutions: The Media and Democratization in Eastern Europe*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gurevitch, M., Blumler, J. 1990. Political Communication Systems and Democratic Values. In Lichtenberg, J., ed. *Democracy and the Mass Media*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Iyengar, S. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Iyengar, S., and Kinder, D.R. 1987. *News that matters*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Just, M., Crigler, A., Neuman, R. 1998. Cognitive and affective dimensions of political conceptualization. In A. Crigler, ed. *The Psychology of Political Communication*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Kahneman, D., and Tversky, A. 1984. Choices, Values, and Frames. *American Psychologist* 39: 341-50

Kruks, S. 2001. Russian-language Media: A Foreign Observer? *Latvijas mediju analīze (Daudzveidība III)*. Rīga, 51-70.

Mancini, P. 1991. The public sphere and the use of news in a 'coalition' system of government. In Dahlgren, P., Sparks, C., eds. *Communication and Citizenship*. London: Routledge

Neuman, W. R., Just, M., Crigler, A. N. 1992. *Common knowledge. News and the construction of political meaning*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nickels, H. 2005. *Framing the Refugee and Asylum Question in Luxembourg: An Interactive Approach to Framing Theory*. Unpublished PhD dissertation

Norris, P. 2000. Evaluating Media Performance. In *Virtuous circle: Political communication in Postindustrial Societies*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Pan, Z., and Kosicki, G.M. 1993. Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication* 10: 55-75

Patterson, T.E. 1993. *Out of Order*. New York: Vintage Books.

Price, V., Tewksbury, D., Powers, E. 1997. Switching trains of thought: The impact of news frames on reader's cognitive responses. *Communication Research*, 24, 481-506.

Rozumilowicz, B. 2002. Democratic Change: a theoretical perspective. In Price, E., Rozumilowicz, B., Verhulst, S., eds. *Media Reform: Democratizing the Media, Democratizing the State*. London: Routledge.

Semetko, H. A., and Valkenburg, P. M. 2000. Framing European politics. A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication* 14: 459-479

Shah, D., Watts, M., Domke, D. and Fan, D. 2002. News framing and queing of issue regimes. Explaining Clinton's public approval in spite of scandal. *Public Opinion Quarterly,* 66: 339-370.

Stevenson, R. 1995. Freedom of the press around the world. In: John C. Merrill, ed. *Global Journalism. Survey of International Communication*, 63-76. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Tankard, J. 2001. The Empirical Approach to the Study of Media Framing In Reese, S., Gandy. O., Grant. A., eds. *Framing Public Life*. London: Lawrence Elbaum

Valkenburg, P.M., Semetko, H.A., de Vreese, C. 1999. The effect of news frames on readers' recall and thoughts. *Communication Research* 26: 550-568.