War on the Web
The Immediate News Framing of Gulf War II

Theoretical Background

- The media are, by default, influenced by the political, economic, and social constraints of the broader systems in which they exist...

- (They) actively serve the “national interest,” as determined by other, more powerful actors and institutions.

Framing Rooted In The “domestication” of news

- Translating the news for the local audience and framing it in ways targeted to the given culture.
  - by using different actors,
  - different themes,
  - different communication strategies.
Framing & Agenda Setting

- (Agenda Setting Theory) the media tell us what the issues of the day are and focus the public's agenda on specific events.
- (Framing Theory), the media also play an important role in framing public issues and events by making certain aspects more salient than others while putting a specific news angle or “spin” on these elements.

Framing

- “the central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events.”

Framing War

- …in a case of war, the media can select to focus on the destruction of war as opposed to freedom from tyranny, can frame the event as an invasion versus attack, can emphasize the victims versus invaders, and can highlight a positive versus negative attitude toward the war.
Influences on Framing

- Media frames reflect the beliefs of the public at large and are a result of a multitude of factors.
  - Individual schemas of reporters and editors as well as journalistic practices and routines, cultural values and broader sociopolitical forces shape the selection of media frames

Two Types of Frames: Episodic and Thematic.

- Episodic frames are references to isolated news events without providing broader context
  - Episodic frames tend to put responsibility on specific groups or individuals

- Thematic frames, on the other hand, provide broader societal context to issues and events and thus present more complete pictures and collective evidence.
  - Thematic frames attribute responsibility to societal/political forces.

Web & Framing

- Hyperlinks
  - Text that makes particular words “hot” in that the user can click on them to receive even more information about that particular topic
  - Users can choose to navigate through various news articles to inform his or her own interests or agenda.
  - Web editors control what is linked to in any given article on their site, but the user is not forced to consume the links
Review of Results

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame</th>
<th>Present across All News Web Sites</th>
<th>U.S. Web Sites</th>
<th>International Web Sites</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military conflict*</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human interest*</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic frame</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiself-reference*</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility frame</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic frame</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 372

*Statistically significant differences between international and U.S. news Web sites at the .01 level, using Fisher’s exact test.

Review of Results

- U.S. news Web sites were more likely to refer to the event as an “attack” or a “strike” (88 percent) compared with the foreign sites (77 percent).
- U.S. media cited more often freedom for the Iraqi people as justification for the war, which was rarely mentioned in foreign sites.
- Both domestic and foreign Web sites cited regime change/removal of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction among the reasons to go to war.
- Review of Results

- U.S. news Web sites were more likely to refer to the event as an “attack” or a “strike” (88 percent) compared with the foreign sites (77 percent).
- U.S. media cited more often freedom for the Iraqi people as justification for the war, which was rarely mentioned in foreign sites.
- Both domestic and foreign Web sites cited regime change/removal of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction among the reasons to go to war.
- Review of Results

- U.S. news Web sites were more likely to refer to the event as an “attack” or a “strike” (88 percent) compared with the foreign sites (77 percent).
- U.S. media cited more often freedom for the Iraqi people as justification for the war, which was rarely mentioned in foreign sites.
- Both domestic and foreign Web sites cited regime change/removal of Saddam and weapons of mass destruction among the reasons to go to war.
Review of Results

The final hypothesis predicted that episodic frames would be more common than thematic frames in the initial coverage of the event.

- Dominant frames in our study were the two episodic frames of military conflict (96 percent) and human interest (74 percent), confirming episodic frames fail to provide broader context to the event.

The third most common frame across all Web sites was the diagnostic frame (33 percent), which discussed the reasons that led to the war.

- The media self referential frame (22 percent)
- The responsibility frame (22 percent).

The least common frame in the early coverage was the prognostic frame (17 percent).

- In other words, coverage about the consequences of the war was infrequent. This is not surprising considering this was the beginning stage of the conflict
Characteristics of Immediate Online Coverage of the Iraq War

- Associated Press was often used as a source for both photos and stories.

- The most common photo was one showing troops or military equipment (such as aircraft or artillery), which was observed in 24 percent of the sites.

Justification for the War

- most online media cited removal of Saddam as the main reason (54 percent),

- the claim of weapons of mass destruction (30 percent),

- freedom for the Iraqi people (22 percent).

- Four of the news sites mentioned U.S. aspirations for world dominance as a reason for the war.

Justification for the War

- Most common in the overall online coverage was the mention of countries directly involved in the decision to go to war:
  - Great Britain (20 percent),
  - Kuwait (18 percent),
  - France (14 percent),
  - Turkey (11 percent),
  - Russia (7 percent),
  - Germany (6 percent).

- The United States was mentioned in virtually all home pages (97 percent).
Final Points

- It seems clear from the finding of more positive news coverage in coalition members’ news sites that national media are influenced by the overall political environment in which they exist.

Final Points

- More episodic frames were expected in this early coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, as earlier research has suggested that this is the general tendency in coverage of breaking news with two episodic frames—military conflict and human interest frame—clearly dominating.

- A lack of understanding of the broader social forces shaping the conflict in Iraq may result if... the media continue to focus on episodic elements, thus failing to present “the big picture.”

Differences in Coverage May Influence Public Opinion

- Many countries in the Arab world and elsewhere blamed the United States and its allies for the number of civilian casualties in Iraq:
  - 91 percent in Morocco,
  - 88 percent in Turkey,
  - 79 percent in Brazil,
  - 74 percent in France

- as opposed to only 14 percent in the United States and 26 percent in Israel.
Differences in Coverage May Influence Public Opinion

- A study by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (2003) found that American media did a poor job of explaining the Iraq War to the American public, leading to sustained misperceptions of the event.

- For example, a large portion of the U.S. population believed that weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq, that Saddam had significant ties with al-Qaeda, and that world opinion was mostly in support of the war.

Final Note

- The differences among the online publications show that even in the age of globalization, national media exhibit a range of differences—both in framing and objective characteristics of the coverage.