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Framing pension reform in the news: Traditional versus social media

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Abstract: Social media are increasingly important in the news menu of media users. Differences in news production processes between traditional and social media may lead to differences in how political and social issues are depicted, and this may, eventually, have consequences for the information that reaches citizens about an issue. Against this background, this study compares content across the two media types to examine whether and how the framing of a sociopolitical issue differs between newspaper articles and posts on social media. The empirical analyses are based on a content analysis of newspaper articles ($n = 414$) and social media messages ($n = 2,771$) conducted in the context of the socially contested issue of raising the retirement age in the Netherlands. Findings suggest that different content production processes can still lead to similar outcomes as both media types emphasize problems with (instead of solutions to) the retirement age issue. Our findings also confirm differences across traditional and social media, although these differences are substantially relatively small. While traditional news media emphasize conflict-related frames more often than social media, social media present more frame diversity in solutions.

Keywords: traditional and social media, news framing, diagnostic and prognostic framing, retirement age, content analysis

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1 Introduction

In recent years, the nature of the news media landscape has changed. People increasingly use social media as a news source (Gil de Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Diehl, 2018). While news production in traditional news media is based on professional journalists and editors following institutional norms and routines, the rise of social media has integrated a wider array of actors in the news cycle, who are driven by rather different considerations (Bergström and Jervelycke Belfrage, 2018; Nielsen and Schrøder, 2014). Differences in the content production between traditional and social media may lead to systematic differences in how an issue is depicted, which means that the content that people receive about an issue from social media may be substantially different from what people receive about it from traditional media alone.

Existing research suggests that the information that reaches citizens via social media is quite different from the reporting by traditional news media. For example, Soroka, Daku, Hiaeshutter-Rice, Guggenheim, and Pasek (2018) reveal that traditional media reflect a negativity bias in their reporting of the economy, while the economic information circulated through Twitter reflects a positivity bias. Moreover, by comparing journalists' presentation of news stories across their own (traditional) sources and social media, other studies reveal that journalists' social media updates differ from their original news stories (Hågvar, 2019; Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). For example, Welbers and Opgenhaffen (2019) show that Facebook status messages provided by news organizations are more subjective and positive than headlines and leads of the actual news content.

In line with these previous analyses, the present study compares content across traditional and social media with the aim of examining whether and how the *framing* of a sociopolitical issue differs between newspaper articles and posts on social media. We examine this question in the context of the fundamental sociopolitical issue of raising the retirement age in the Netherlands. As a response to an aging population, many governments worldwide are pursuing pension reforms in which people are expected to retire later (OECD, 2017). The Netherlands can be considered an exemplary European country in this respect (Van Solinge and Henkens, 2017). The retirement age issue is excellent for comparing framing across the two media types for two particular reasons. First, given the profound impact on citizens, the reform measure is controversial and the subject of fierce public debate (Van Solinge and Henkens, 2017), making it a prominent and dynamic news topic in traditional and social media. Second, a distinctive element of the retirement age issue is that it is about extending benefits available today to future generations, making the issue comparable to other future-oriented and contested

issues (e. g., climate change). It is noticeable that working and older generations are biased against the pension reform proposals due to (relative) short-term interests (Van Solinge and Henkens, 2017), while younger and future generations are the ones who will benefit from it in the long run (Naumann, 2014). When it comes to consuming news via traditional and social media, age makes a large difference (Newman et al., 2021). Older generations are more likely to primarily rely on traditional news media for (political) news, while younger generations mainly use social media for (political) news (Holt, Shehata, Strömbäck, and Ljungberg, 2013; Lauf and Scholtens, 2019; Newman et al., 2021). Comparing the content that reaches citizens via traditional and social media is therefore of real significance in the context of this issue.

We rely on a content analysis of newspaper coverage (from five popular and quality newspapers) and social media messages (from Facebook, Twitter, and various blogs and forums) in the timespan 2009–2016. Comparing professionally produced news content with more inclusive social media content makes an empirical contribution to the understanding of the way these co-existing media types frame a sociopolitical issue. In case of systematic differences in how journalists frame an issue in traditional news media and how the issue is framed on social media, even subtle variation in how citizens (from various generations) are being informed about, and respond to, an issue can be expected.

Approach to framing

Framing deals with the presentation and meaning construction of issues. Many of the proposed conceptualizations correspond to Entman's (1993) classic definition: "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 for the item described" (p. 52). Central to this definition is selection and salience: A frame draws attention to selected aspects of an issue at the expense of others by making them more salient, which is labeled as emphasis framing (De Vreese, 2005). It is important to note that emphasis frames are distinct from equivalent frames, as the latter involve presenting logically equivalent information in different ways (Cacciatore, Scheufele, and Iyengar, 2016; Vliegenthart, 2012).

Framing provides an excellent way to systematically analyze variation across media content (Vliegenthart, 2012). This study focuses on some of the essential frame features in news reporting. Frames of the issue at hand are identified based on the two core frame features identified by Snow and Benford (1988) that are

also central to Entman's (1993) definition: the problem formulation (*diagnosis*) and the solution formulation (*prognosis*). Diagnostic framing deals with identifying a problem, attributing responsibility for it, and identifying associated victims. Prognostic framing involves a solution to the problem and attributes responsibility to the one accountable for solving the problem (Iyengar, 1991; Snow and Benford, 1988). This problem and solution-oriented approach fits well with the social character of a policy reform and the heated debate about this issue in politics and society, providing a rationale for expecting various diagnostic and prognostic framing elements to be present in media items about this issue. Moreover, this diagnostic and prognostic framing approach has proved useful in studying variation in frames across various contexts, for example, in the context of framing immigration and integration in traditional media and parliament (Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007), framing of the economic crisis across print media (Damstra and Vliegenthart, 2018), and framing older workers' employability in traditional and corporate media (Kroon, Van Selm, Ter Hoeven, and Vliegenthart, 2017).

Production of news content in traditional and social media

Due to distinctive features that characterize traditional and social media, there are vast differences in the content production between them. Central to these differences is the concept of media logic, which concerns the processes through which media produce and transmit content. Following media logic, the way media communicate issues depends on the distinctive features of each medium, including format, style, production process, and routines (Altheide, 2013; Altheide and Snow, 1979). More concretely, media logic refers to "the news values and the storytelling techniques the media make use of to take advantage of their own medium and its format, and to be competitive in the ongoing struggle to capture people's attention" (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 233).

This idea means that there are distinctive logics that underpin traditional and social media (Klinger and Svensson, 2015; Van Dijck and Poell, 2013), with specific patterns of content production and dissemination following from these logics. Traditional news media, such as newspapers, have a distinct logic based on professional journalists and editors following institutional norms and routines in their gatekeeping role (Singer, 2010). Dramatizing the news, presenting negative or conflicting information, and 'indexing' content to the governmental discourse are some of the most identified tendencies in the news production of traditional news media. In contrast, content production on social media is driven by different considerations. On social media platforms, any actor can participate

in producing and disseminating content, including politicians and journalists. A diverse group of users produces social media content based on more personal motivations and preferences rather than following specific norms and routines (Klinger and Svensson, 2015; Weeks and Holbert, 2013). Comparable to other studies (e. g., Soroka et al., 2018), we approach social media content from an audience perspective, in the sense that we do not distinguish between different types of sources, but rather focus on *all* messages people potentially can encounter about the retirement age issue via social media. In terms of an underlying logic, some studies argue for a social media logic characterized by particular dynamics (Enli and Simonsen, 2018): for instance, in the sense that content generation on social media comes from amateur production and so-called ‘produsage’ by (lay) users (Klinger and Svensson, 2015) and is based on a more interpersonal and subjective logic (Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). The current study is in line with the argumentation of these studies; however, we are careful to adopt the term of social media logic as we focus on multiple social media platforms and do not distinguish between different types of users.

Variation in frames across traditional and social media

Characterized by economic pressure and commercial influence, traditional news media need to compete with other outlets and sell the news. To be competitive in this ongoing struggle for public attention, journalists and editors are inclined to dramatize the news (Bennett, 2004; Kunelius, 2006). Previous research suggests that journalists and editors tend to highlight problems in the coverage of social issues more than providing a solution-focused perspective (Kroon et al., 2017; Snow, Vliegthart, and Corrigan-Brown, 2007). Hagelund and Grødem (2017) find that newspaper articles problematize pension reforms, especially in terms of pension wealth distribution. In addition, traditional news media are faced with limited space for news stories. Consequently, journalists and editors need to decide what (not) to include in the news. To determine what kind of information is newsworthy and appeals to the audience, they use news values (Harcup and O’Neill, 2017). News values represent a set of guidelines that journalists and editors use to determine which events become news. Negativity is an important news value, and we know from previous research that frames that receive journalistic attention reflect news values (Luther and Zhou, 2005). Following this reasoning, we expect journalists to be more inclined to use diagnostic than prognostic frames.

Although social media are also about re-distributing traditional news stories, producing content on social media does not follow a structured editorial process.

Instead, social media users are driven by personal motives. Therefore, social media (often) contain personal stories and commentary (Guggenheim, Jang, Bae, and Neuman, 2015; Smith, Fischer, and Yongjian, 2012; Soroka et al., 2018). Following this personalized character, previous research has suggested that social media content contains more emotional expressions than content in traditional sources (Guggenheim et al., 2015; Klinger and Svensson, 2015; Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). The pension reform of raising the retirement age received fierce opposition, as the measure causes disruptions in long and widely-held expectations of citizens' retirement (Eichhorst and Wintermann, 2006). Since many people may experience short-term implications of the measure but do not (necessarily) benefit from it, we expect negative emotions to be prevalent among citizens. Previous research also reflects these negative emotions, showing that older workers are angry and worried about working longer and retiring later (Van Solinge and Henkens, 2017). These emotionally engaged citizens are probably particularly likely to be actively involved in the debate on social media, mainly emphasizing problems related to the issue. For these reasons, we also expect social media content to be focused on diagnostic rather than prognostic frames.

H1a: Both traditional news media and social media content will contain more diagnostic than prognostic frames.

Journalists and editors are characterized in their norms and routines by a heavy reliance on official sources that are associated with, for example, governmental departments or the policy-making process (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2009). The reliance on official sources is in line with the indexing theory about state-press relations, which refers to the notion that traditional news media primarily cover policy issues from the governmental perspective (Bennett, 1990; Neuman, Guggenheim, Mo Jang, and Bae, 2014). We, therefore, anticipate that journalists depend upon official sources in their news reporting on the retirement age issue, which will be reflected in how journalists frame the issue (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2009). Government officials probably focus on the purpose and (future) benefits of the measure and may release information related to solutions more than problems in an effort to collect support for the policy measure. Therefore, we expect that—although generally using more diagnostic frames—journalists and editors are also likely to provide an account of the retirement age issue from a solution-focused angle (using prognostic frames). Previous research has suggested that journalists shift their attention from diagnostic to prognostic framing over time, as identifying solutions becomes the focal concern when a debate or event progresses (Snow et al., 2007). Hence, we expect that traditional news media content contains fewer diagnostic frames over time.

Since producing content on social media is guided by personal interests and motives, framing depends on users' own opinions and preferences. Due to opposition and negative emotional reactions such as anger and worry, we expect that social media content contains prognostic frames to a lesser extent than traditional news media. Looking at social media content over time, we expect that negative emotional reactions become even stronger, especially after the government's official implementation of the pension reform. Hence, contrary to the decrease in diagnostic framing in traditional news media content over time, we expect that social media content remains focused on diagnostic framing.

H1b: Traditional news media content will contain more prognostic frames than social media content.

H2a: Over time, the presence of diagnostic frames will decrease in traditional news media content.

H2b: Over time, the presence of diagnostic frames will remain the same in social media content.

Adhering to the norm of objectivity, journalists and editors in traditional news media face the challenge of bringing more than one view into a news item. To balance different views, journalists try to highlight different interpretations of an issue in their reporting, thereby leaving the interpretation to the audience (Baden and Springer, 2014; Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro, and De Vreese, 2013). In practice, this norm of objectivity means that journalists tend to present conflicting or opposing views (Bartholomé, Lecheler, and De Vreese, 2015), especially in political news (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, and Boumans, 2011). Many studies have identified the importance of conflict as a distinctive storytelling technique. Based on the prominent role of conflict in news content (e. g., Harcup and O'Neill, 2017; Valkenburg and Semetko, 2000), and given that conflicting interests dominate the retirement age issue, we expect journalists to be likely to present the issue in terms of conflict-related frames. Over time, however, we expect the presence of conflict-related frames to decrease because the level of disagreement declines, at least in political terms, as the reform process to raise the retirement age matures (Parlevliet, 2017).

Different from journalists following norms and routines, social media users are more independent in framing policy issues (Neuman et al., 2014). Frame construction is in the hands of many (ordinary) users. Social media platforms allow them to produce any issue interpretation, as no selection procedure exists for publication (Baden and Springer, 2014). In this sense, social media users can challenge discourses and share alternative perspectives (Loader and Mercea, 2011). We anticipate that the content about the retirement age issue is divided

across various frames, leading to the expectation that frame diversity is large for social media.

- H3a: Traditional news media content will contain more conflict-related frames than social media content.*
- H3b: Over time, the presence of conflict-related frames will decrease in traditional news media content.*
- H4: Social media content will contain more frame diversity than traditional news media content.*

2 Methods

Sample

Using manual content analysis, we investigated how the retirement age issue was framed in traditional and social media content over eight years (2009–2016). This period covered the first moment the Dutch government introduced its plan to raise the retirement age (2009), the actual implementation (2012), and its aftermath in subsequent years.

We selected newspapers to represent traditional news media in this study. Although television news programs are the primary traditional news source for many people in the Netherlands, printed newspapers are still widely read (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, and Nielsen, 2019). Besides, newspapers are the more generic form of traditional news media, as journalistic norms and practices dominate these outlets. We included the five largest Dutch national newspapers: two popular newspapers (*Algemeen Dagblad*, *De Telegraaf*) and three quality newspapers (*De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw*).

We selected Facebook, Twitter, and various blogs and forums to represent the diverse social media landscape. Facebook and (to a lesser extent) Twitter are among the most frequently used social media platforms for news in the Netherlands (Newman et al., 2019). In addition, a large number of blogs and forums exist in the social media landscape (Smith et al., 2012). Any actor can produce content on social media, including politicians and journalists. This means that there is a wide array of sources, but an in-depth investigation of sources is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this study approached social media content from an audience perspective. As people who rely on social media can potentially be exposed to *all* these messages, we did not distinguish between different types of users and selected all content related to the issue.

We used an extensive search string to collect newspaper articles and social media messages via LexisNexis and Coosto¹, respectively Van den Heijkant, Van Selm, Hellsten & Vliegenthart (2019). We narrowed the focus by using a second search string, mainly to exclude items focusing on related subissues (e. g., sustainable employability, pension funds). Taking the message length of the different media into account, this resulted in two slightly different search strings: one for newspapers, blogs, and forums and one for Facebook and Twitter. We used wildcards to account for plurals and grammatical variations of words. This search resulted in 1,072 newspaper articles and (after removing duplicates) 10,191 social media messages.

A stratified random sample of 414 newspaper articles (38.6%) and 2,771 social media messages (27.2%) was manually coded in our content analysis. Only media items explicitly referring to the pension reform of raising the retirement age in the Netherlands were further analyzed in the content analysis. For traditional news media, this resulted in 382 newspaper articles: 43 from *Algemeen Dagblad*, 84 from *De Telegraaf*, 100 from *De Volkskrant*, 81 from *NRC Handelsblad*, and 74 from *Trouw*. For social media, the process resulted in 2,130 social media messages: 875 from Twitter, 142 from Facebook², and 1,113 from blogs (e. g., *50-plusser*, *De Dagelijkse Standaard*, *Effectory*) and forums (e. g., *Fok! Forum*, *DeBeurs*, *Vara Kassa Forum*).

Coding procedure and reliability

The coding procedure consisted of two phases. In the first phase, we inductively identified issue-specific frames through a qualitative pre-study. Rather than analyzing a priori defined frames, frames emerge naturally from the data. An inductive approach is well-suited to assessing variation in frames across traditional and social media, as it allows openness to frames used in *both* media types. We analyzed a random subset of newspaper articles and social media messages with sensitizing questions to identify issue-specific diagnostic and prognostic frames: “What is seen as the problem?”, “Who is seen as responsible for causing the problem?”, “Whose problem is it seen to be?”, “What should be done to solve the issue?”, and “Who is taking responsibility to solve the issue?” (for a similar approach, see Kroon et al., 2017; Vliegenthart and Roggeband, 2007). We continued this qualitative analysis until no new framing elements emerged (theoretic-

¹ Coosto stores social media messages that are publicly available. This means that, for example, private Facebook posts are not included in our study.

² For Facebook, we could unfortunately only collect posts and comments from 2016.

Table 1: The identified diagnostic and prognostic frames in traditional and social media.

	Typical examples	
	Traditional news media	Social media
Diagnostic frames		
<i>Disruption of financial plans</i> Financial problems, uncertainty, or disruption of life plan	“The rise in the state pension age leads to an additional increase of elderly people needing social assistance benefits” (De Volkskrant-August-2016).	“Because the retirement age is shifting to 67 years and partner state pension is abolished for people born after 1 January 1950, I have a gap of more than €70,000” (Facebook-December-2016).
<i>Confusion about pension</i> Confused, ignorant, or unrealistic about one’s own pension	“Many young citizens don’t even know that their pension accrual rate was reduced the moment the retirement age was raised” (Trouw-August-2015).	“67 years is known information for many customers, but that the increase continues even further is new information for many people” (Forum-October-2014).
<i>Inequality between groups</i> Ignorance of differences between individuals or groups	“Quite a few people think that raising the retirement age is unfair and puts a disproportionate burden on certain, especially lower, income groups” (De Volkskrant-October-2009).	“Let’s be honest, in the better jobs, people take care of themselves, and there are many who can retire early. Again, it is the people in the jobs that are already struggling, physically, to reach the finish line, who suffer” (Facebook-November-2016).
<i>Poor labor market position of older workers</i> Negative images and stereotypes of older workers	“Raising the state pension age will not improve the willingness of employers to hire older workers” (De Volkskrant-June-2015).	“There is no point in #raising the state pension age as long as employers are not forced to hire and retain older people #cbb” (Twitter-March-2012).

Table 1: (continued)

		Typical examples	
		Traditional news media	Social media
<i>Generational conflict</i>	Pressure on the solidarity between young and older people	“With the discussion about the retirement age, solidarity between generations has also come under pressure” (Trouw-December-2010).	“Criticism Council of State on bill #pensionagreement: State pension age increase too slow and imbalance in interests young and old” (Twitter-October-2011).
<i>Political disagreement</i>	Political negotiation and commotion around the policy reform	“Raising the retirement age is a clear decision by coalition parties CDA, PvdA, and ChristenUnie, while opposition parties SP and PVV are resolutely against this idea” (NRC Handelsblad-March-2010).	“Senate agrees grumbly with the rise in the state pension age: The state pension age will increase in steps from 1 January 2013” (Twitter-July-2012).
<i>Unjustified austerity measure</i>	Policy reform serves the government's own financial problems	“Why should 2009 be the benchmark for linking the state pension age to life expectancy? Because it has become clear that a handful of greedy bankers have brought the world economy on the verge of collapse” (NRC Handelsblad-October-2009).	“The government has already reduced so much of our pension and increased the retirement age. Now they need more money, so the retirement age needs to be raised again” (Facebook-October-2016).
Prognostic frames			
<i>Alternative ideas</i>	Alternative ideas and suggestions to improve the reform measure	“Jongerius sees more in a flexible setup. Employees should be able to choose when they retire, between the ages of 65 and 70 years. If you quit working later, you will also receive a higher benefit” (De Telegraaf-February-2010).	“You can think of a system where the group up to 40 years retires one month later, the group from 40 to 50 years retires half a month later, and people are always entitled to retire at 65 years after 40 years of working” (Forum-February-2009).
<i>Innovating labor market</i>	Need for a modern labor market, improving the employability of (older) employees	“Minister Bos wants to oblige employers to take measures to keep employees fit, via a change in the legislation of working conditions” (Trouw-September-2009).	“Entitled to training, a mandatory career policy, fewer vacation days, and a lower salary. These are some measures that should make it more attractive for employers to keep employees working up to 67 years” (Blog-December-2009).

Table 1: (continued)

Typical examples	
	Social media
<p><i>Fostering individualization</i> People need to take responsibility for their own retirement</p> <p><i>Improving communication about pension</i> Providing more insight and overview of people's pensions</p> <p><i>Reversing the decision</i> Reversing the decision to raise the retirement age</p>	<p>Traditional news media</p> <p>“A Dutch professor of pension sociology points to the possibility of individual saving in order to be able to retire earlier” (De Telegraaf-September-2010). “During these three days, more than 250 organizations are committed to give Dutch people more insight and overview into their pension situation, now and later” (De Telegraaf-October-2014). “Nothing needs to be reversed. The bill for raising the retirement age to 67 years has not yet been passed by the chamber. The cabinet has resigned, so the bill is put on hold. It simply should not be introduced” (De Telegraaf-February-2010).</p> <p>Social media</p> <p>“If you are confronted with a reduction in your income, it is important to take a good look at your expenses” (Blog-November-2016). “A partnership between the government, business community, and other parties is organizing the Pensioen3daagse. The aim is to encourage people to be actively involved in their own pension situation” (Blog-September-2011). “The retirement age simply should be reversed to 65 years” (Facebook-November-2011).</p>

cal saturation; $n = 262$), resulting in seven diagnostic frames and five prognostic frames. Table 1 gives an overview of these frames.

After developing the coding instrument based on the qualitative pre-study, we moved to the second deductive phase. Four coders were trained in coding the materials until we reached a satisfactory level of consensus on all categories in the codebook. The coders coded media items using a series of closed-ended questions. Each question was designed to measure the presence of a frame, and multiple frames could be coded per unit.

Intercoder reliability was established, at different moments, on a representative sample of 245 randomly selected items from a popular and quality newspaper ($n = 31$) and each social media platform ($n = 214$). We relied on standardized Lotus coefficients to assess intercoder reliability, which corrects for agreement based on chance and is particularly suitable for dichotomous variables that are skewed or score low on “positives” (Aaldering and Vliegthart, 2016). Standardized Lotus coefficients and percentage agreement yielded satisfactory results (see Table 2).

Table 2: Intercoder reliability results.

	Intercoder reliability	
	Standardized Lotus	Average pairwise percent agreement
Diagnostic frames ($n = 755$)		
Disruption of financial plans	.83	88.05
Confusion about pension	.92	96.45
Inequality between groups	.87	92.78
Poor labor market position of older workers	.92	96.82
Generational conflict	.91	95.83
Political disagreement	.80	86.00
Unjustified austerity measure	.92	96.92
Prognostic frames ($n = 755$)		
Alternative ideas	.80	87.15
Innovating labor market	.91	95.87
Fostering individualization	.92	97.48
Improving communication about pension	.93	98.13
Reversing the decision	.88	93.45

Note: n represents the number of codings on which the comparison is based.

Analysis

We computed the scores of all diagnostic frames into one variable representing the presence of diagnostic frames, ranging from 0 to 5 diagnostic frames present in a media item. We did the same for the presence of prognostic frames, and this scale ranged from 0 to 3. Given the unequal number of seven diagnostic and five prognostic frames in our codebook, we recoded the scale of diagnostic frames into the same scale as prognostic frames for the analyses in which we compared the presence of both frame types. In the analyses in which we compared *across* media, we relied on the share (percentage) of a particular frame type relative to all frames. For H3a and H3b, we grouped inequality between groups, generational conflict, and political disagreement as conflict-related frames as these frames are the ones that emphasize disagreement between individuals, institutions, or countries (De Vreese, Peter, and Semetko, 2001). We created a time variable for the hypotheses dealing with over-time expectations that included all months in our research period, from month 1 to month 96. Finally, to measure how widely attention is distributed across frames, we relied on the Herfindahl Index, which is often used in economics to measure market concentration. The maximum score of 1 represents a complete concentration of one frame in the news, while a Herfindahl Index that approaches zero indicates more diversity in frames. We used the monthly share of each frame to calculate the Herfindahl Index for both media types. To check for internal differences in framing *within* traditional and social media, we performed additional analyses in which we further specified the results per newspaper and social media platform.

3 Results

Descriptive results

Before testing the hypotheses, we describe the diagnostic and prognostic frames that emerged from the qualitative pre-study. These descriptions are presented in Table 1, including typical examples. Although representing the same diagnostic and prognostic frames in terms of content, the qualitative analysis did reveal a clear difference in the language and style of framing across traditional and social media, which is in line with other comparative studies of these media types (Hågvar, 2019; Klinger and Svensson, 2015; Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). Frames on social media exhibit a more subjective and emotional style, expressed from the author's perspective and state, which is marked as a distinctive feature of content produc-

tion on social media (Welbers and Opgenhaffen, 2019). For instance, as shown in Table 1, a newspaper presents the frame ‘inequality between groups’ relatively objectively and from a distance. In contrast, the same frame on social media is written from the author’s emotional state, which is reflected in subjective language. Frames on social media also have a more personalized nature compared to the ones in traditional news media (Klinger and Svensson, 2015). This difference is, for example, reflected in the frame ‘disruption of financial plans’, where the example on social media showed a more personal focus than the one in a newspaper.

Beyond language and style, we examined the over-time presence of diagnostic and prognostic frames in traditional and social media (see Figure 1). We see a similar trend over time for the monthly presence of diagnostic and prognostic frames as well as for the two media types. Table 3 shows similarities and differences in the presence of each issue-specific frame across traditional and social media. Regarding diagnostic frames, journalists in traditional news media highlight ‘political disagreement’ most in their content, while social media users emphasize ‘disruption of financial plans’ the most, closely followed by ‘political disagreement’. When framing the retirement age issue from a solution-focused angle, ‘alternative ideas’ are emphasized the most in traditional and social media content, while ‘reversing the decision’ is the second most prominent prognostic frame present in social media.

Table 3: The presence of the issue-specific frames in traditional and social media.

	Traditional news media		Social media	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Diagnostic frames	263	68.8	846	39.7
Disruption of financial plans	99	25.9	326	15.3
Confusion about pension	20	5.2	68	3.2
Inequality between groups	71	18.6	148	6.9
Poor labor market position of older workers	42	11.0	145	6.8
Generational conflict	38	9.9	62	2.9
Political disagreement	148	38.7	320	15.0
Unjustified austerity measure	20	5.2	46	2.2
Prognostic frames	159	41.6	417	19.6
Alternative ideas	103	27.0	212	10.0
Innovating labor market	42	11.0	85	4.0
Fostering individualization	19	5.0	46	2.2
Improving communication about pension	4	1.0	14	0.7
Reversing the decision	27	7.1	119	5.6

Note: Regarding the overall presence of diagnostic and prognostic frames (presented in bold), *n* and % represent the number of articles in which at least one diagnostic or prognostic frame was present.

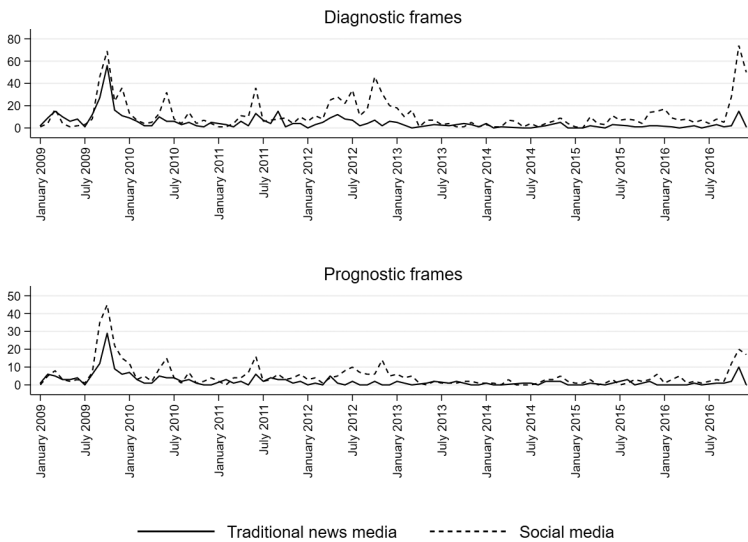


Figure 1: Over-time presence of diagnostic and prognostic frames in traditional and social media.

Note: The graphs have different values marked along the y-axes.

Variation in frames across traditional and social media

We now address our hypotheses assessing the use of diagnostic and prognostic frames across traditional and social media. H1a predicted that both traditional and social media would cover more diagnostic than prognostic frames. To test this, two paired samples *t*-tests were performed—one for each media type—to compare the means of the presence of diagnostic and prognostic frames per item, on a scale from 0 to 3. For traditional news media, the average presence of diagnostic frames ($M = 1.11$, $SD = .96$) was significantly higher than that of prognostic frames ($M = .51$, $SD = .68$). This difference is statistically significant, $t = 12.025$, $p < .001$, $df = 381$. The same statistical difference was found for social media, $t = 17.539$, $p < .001$, $df = 2129$. The average presence of diagnostic frames ($M = .52$, $SD = .74$) was significantly higher than that of prognostic frames ($M = .22$, $SD = .48$). This means we accept H1a. Additional analyses show that a further specification of media source yields the same results, which means that every newspaper and social media platform in our sample shows a similar pattern of covering more diagnostic than prognostic frames.

H1b, which predicted that traditional news media would cover more prognostic frames than social media, was tested using an independent samples t -test to compare the share of prognostic frames (i. e., the presence of prognostic frames relative to the presence of all frames) across traditional and social media. Results show no significant difference in the share of prognostic frames across traditional news media ($M = .28, SD = .32$) and social media ($M = .28, SD = .38; t = .153, p = .878, df = 549.469$). Thus, we reject H1b. Additional analyses in which we further dissect media source show similar results of no significant differences in the share of prognostic frames across media sources, with the notable exception of blogs and forums, which have a significantly larger share of prognostic frames compared to Twitter, in particular.

H2a proposed that, over time, the presence of diagnostic frames would decrease in traditional news media content. Linear regression analysis indicates that time is not a statistically significant predictor of the presence of diagnostic frames in traditional news media content, $F(1,380) = 3.638, p = .057, R^2 = .009$. Although the negative coefficient hints at a small decrease, it is not significant, and therefore we reject H2a. Specifying these results per newspaper, additional analyses show that quality newspapers *De Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* demonstrate a significant decrease. For social media, we proposed in H2b that the over-time presence of diagnostic frames remained the same. Linear regression analysis shows that time is a statistically significant predictor of the presence of diagnostic frames in social media content, $F(1,2128) = 5.702, p < .05, R^2 = .003$. The negative coefficient points to a small decrease of diagnostic frames over time here, which means we reject H2b. Additional analyses show similar patterns across the specific social media sources, yet not in a significant way.

H3a proposed that traditional news media content would contain more conflict-related frames than social media content. We performed an independent samples t -test to compare the share of conflict-related frames across traditional and social media. Significant differences were found, $t = 4.166, p < .001, df = 488.586$. The average share of conflict-related frames in traditional news media content ($M = .60, SD = .41$) was significantly higher than that in social media content ($M = .47, SD = .46$). Hence, we accept H3a. Specifying these results per newspaper and social media platform, we see that quality newspaper *De Volkskrant* stands out in using conflict-related frames compared to the social media platforms in our sample.

H3b predicted that, over time, the presence of conflict-related frames would decrease in traditional news media content. A linear regression analysis indicated that time is a statistically significant predictor of the presence of conflict-related frames in traditional news media, $F(1,261) = 20.261, p < .001, R^2 = .072$. For every additional month, the share of conflict-related frames in newspaper arti-

cles decreased by .004. Although this indicates a small decrease, we accept H3b. Additional analyses show that the conflict-related frames decrease in particular in quality newspaper *De Volkskrant* and popular newspaper *Telegraaf*.

H4 proposed that there would be more diversity across frames in social media content than in traditional news media content. To test this, two independent samples *t*-tests were performed to compare the Herfindahl Index across traditional and social media—one for diagnostic frames and one for prognostic frames. For diagnostic frames, there was more frame diversity in social media content ($M = .46$, $SD = .26$) than in traditional news media content ($M = .52$, $SD = .28$), but this difference is not significant ($t = 1.417$, $p = .158$, $df = 168$). For prognostic frames, there was also more frame diversity in social media content ($M = .60$, $SD = .27$) than in traditional news media content ($M = .71$, $SD = .28$), and this difference is significant ($t = 2.240$, $p < .05$, $df = 144$). Based on this, H4 can be accepted for prognostic frames but needs to be rejected for diagnostic frames. Additional analyses show that the differences between traditional and social media in this regard are mainly driven by blogs and forums and, to some degree, Facebook.

4 Discussion

The present study investigated the framing of the socially contested issue of raising the retirement age in the content across traditional and social media. Comparing professionally produced news content with more inclusive social media content provides detailed information about the generic differences of the content that reaches citizens through these two co-existing media types. Although traditional and social media differ considerably in content production, findings tell us that the framing of the retirement age issue on social media is not that different from the depiction of the issue in traditional news media. It seems, therefore, that different content production processes can, in some cases, still lead to similar outcomes and, in others, to differences that are ultimately not *that* strong.

We first elaborate on our findings showing similarities in how the retirement age issue is framed in traditional and social media. First, as anticipated, we found that emphasis was placed on problems with (rather than solutions to) the retirement age issue in both media types. Furthermore, while we expected traditional news media to frame the issue more often in solution-oriented (or prognostic) terms than social media, the share of prognostic frames was comparable across the two media types. It seems, then, that the tendency of traditional and social media to highlight problems is strong for the complex and controversial issue of retirement age. These similarities between traditional and social media are coher-

ent with previous research suggesting that social media follow the agenda set by traditional news media in the context of the retirement age issue (Van den Heijkant, Van Selm, Hellsten & Vliegthart, 2019).

Interestingly, differences also exist in how the issue is framed in traditional and social media, although, they are relatively small. First, compared to traditional news media, the style and language of frames on social media are more subjective, emotional, and personalized. Younger people, who rely on social media, are more exposed to emotionally colored information on the topic and therefore may respond more emotionally to raising the retirement age than (older) people, who tend to follow the issue by reading newspaper articles. Second, newspaper articles contain more conflict-related frames than social media messages. This means that (older) people, who tend to follow news via traditional news media, may learn about the retirement age issue as a conflicting issue and may therefore respond more negatively to the issue relative to (younger) people, who tend to follow the issue on social media, where the emphasis lies less on conflicts. Over time, as expected, the emphasis on conflict-related frames in newspapers decreased. A third significant difference relates to frame diversity: Social media content about the retirement age issue is divided across more frames than traditional news media content. This implies that social media platforms offer people multiple views, while newspapers present only a limited range of perspectives, for which they are frequently criticized (Baden and Springer, 2017). However, this difference in frame diversity was only significant for prognostic frames and not for diagnostic frames, indicating that social media present more frame diversity than newspapers when it comes to solving the issue but not when it comes to problematizing it. Probably actors can share all kinds of solutions on social media, feasible or not, as no selection process exists before publication, while journalists may be more selective in publishing solutions to the problem in traditional news media. This difference potentially implies that (younger) people who are active on social media have a broader range of solution perspectives to choose from than (older) people, who are generally exposed to a relatively limited range of solutions in traditional news media, which may ultimately influence how people respond to the issue. The lack of significant differences in frame diversity for diagnostic frames may be explained by the large amount of attention devoted to them in both media types: The more attention an issue receives, the more room to diversify interpretations (Boydston, 2013). Fourth, there is a systematic difference in the over-time presence of diagnostic frames in traditional and social media. The emphasis on diagnostic frames did not decrease over time in newspapers, while this was unexpectedly the case for diagnostic frames on social media. This potentially means that people who follow the news via social media view the issue as less problematic over time than traditional news media consumers.

This study is not without limitations. Most notably, we considered social media as one type of media. Some of these platforms (e. g., blogs) might be more similar to traditional news media in terms of use and purposes, while others (e. g., Twitter) might differ more from traditional news media. To account for this, we conducted additional analyses in which we further specified the results per newspaper and social media platform. These additional results generally show little to no internal differences in framing *within* traditional and social media, although blogs and forums in particular and, in some instances, quality newspapers behave somewhat differently. An interesting direction for future research would be to scrutinize and compare inter- and intra-media differences in framing more systematically. Moreover, although professional journalists publish newspaper content largely according to institutional norms and routines, some content might not be written in a journalistic style (e. g., guest columns, entertainment components). This can be problematic for our argumentation; however, we rarely encountered non-journalistic messages in traditional media during our qualitative pre-study and content analysis.

The present study moved beyond extant research by demonstrating important similarities and differences in issue framing across traditional and social media. Knowledge of issue framing helps to understand information streams in these distinct media types, which is crucial to taking a step toward understanding (differences in) public perceptions and support or opposition for issues with major social relevance. More concretely, this study contributes by showing that traditional and social media focus on problems with (rather than solutions to) the issue. This creates the public image of raising the retirement age as an issue that involves many problems, potentially leading to more opposition to the issue. In terms of differences, our results stress that while traditional news media emphasize conflict-related frames more often than social media, social media present more frame diversity in solutions. This means that social media may create a less conflicting public image for the retirement age issue while providing a platform with more openness to solutions. This leads to the possible conclusion that people who mainly use social media for (political) information are less opposed to the issue than those who consume the news via traditional news media.

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