Framing Europe: television news and European integration

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Chapter I

Introduction

The process of European integration constitutes one of the most significant economic and political developments in post-war Europe. The European community is an expanding entity with a common currency and advanced cooperation in a number of areas ranging from economic policies to defense operations. As the European Union moves towards increasingly advanced economic and political integration, media, and especially news media, play an essential role in informing European citizens about the integration process. Given the high level of uncertainty and complexity of European integration, citizens are likely to be dependent on the media for guidance in interpreting developments as well as forming opinions (e.g., Ball-Rokeach, 1985; Gamson, 1996; Gavin, 1998; Herbst, 1998; Page & Shapiro, 1992). With citizens, politicians, and policy makers relying on the news media as the most important source of information when learning about ‘Europe’ (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002), news media have the potential to influence and alter perceptions and evaluations of ‘Europe’ by emphasizing potential gains and losses, dangers and benefits of further integration.

This study deals with the role news media play in the process of advanced economic and political European integration. This opening chapter provides a general introduction to the theme and the context of the study, formulates the overarching research question, discusses the key features of the design of the study, and outlines the structure of the book. The project is carried out at a key moment when the European continent is facing fundamental challenges and when the relationship between the political arena, citizens, and media is changing. The examination of the link between news media production, content, and public opinion formation provides insights into the processes directing citizens to either embrace or discard economic and political developments in contemporary Europe.
Setting the scene: From Coal to Coins

The focus of the study is on the communication processes in the particular historical, economic, and political context of European integration. A brief introduction to the key issues is warranted.

In the aftermath of World War II, Churchill called for a 'United States of Europe'. Though this idea was not realized immediately, French Foreign Minister, Schuman in 1950 proposed that France and Germany, along with other European countries, pool their coal and steel resources. In 1951 Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands established ECSC, the European Economic Coal and Steel Community, and in 1957 treaties establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) were signed in Rome.

In 1972 the EEC expanded with Britain, Denmark, and Ireland. In 1978 the European Council agreed to launch the European Monetary System (EMS) and the European currency unit (ECU). The eight participating member states (Britain stayed outside) were required to maintain their exchange rates within certain fluctuation margins. Almost ten years later, in 1987, the Single European Act (which 'up-dated' the EEC Treaty) was implemented. Its objective was the completion of a frontier-free market by the end of 1992. Jacques Delors was appointed to chair a committee of experts to examine ways and means of completing an economic and monetary union. The first stage of the European Monetary Union (EMU) was launched in 1990 and involved the removal of most of the remaining restrictions on capital movements, increased coordination of economic policies, and more intensive cooperation between central banks.

In 1991 the European Council agreed on The Treaty of the European Union at a meeting in Maastricht. The aim was the completion of the economic and monetary union and introduction of a single European currency. Denmark and Britain did not participate fully in the new Union framework. Britain chose to exclude chapters in the areas of social policy and defense. In a referendum, required by the Danish Constitution, the Treaty of Maastricht was rejected. A year later, following the Edinburgh negotiations, a new Danish referendum fell out in favor of the Europeanists and Denmark was included in the future cooperation of Europe on the basis of the so-called 'Danish exceptions' which pertain to the monetary union, European citizenship plans, and defense cooperation.

Following the Maastricht Treaty, the euro was legally established as a currency and in spring 1998 the decision on participating member states was made. All EU countries joined the euro, except Britain, Denmark, and Sweden that decided to postpone the final decision. Dutchman Wim Duisenberg was appointed President of the European Central Bank (ECB) and by January 1999 the conversion rates of the participating currencies were irrevocably fixed to the
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euro. The banking and finance industries made the changeover to the euro and the circulation of euro banknotes and coins commenced in January 2002 as the legal tender status of national banknotes and coins disappeared.

The European countries have increased the degree of economic and political integration continuously since World War II. At no point so far have the developments towards integration taken place at such a pace as in the last decade. This study was carried out between the first step (1999) and the full-blown implementation of the euro (2002), witnessed a Danish national referendum on the euro (2000), the lowest turnout ever in European elections (1999), the resignation of the Santer-chaired European Commission (1999), the Irish two-step approval of the Treaty of Nice (2001 / 2002), the launch of an international expert concert addressing the future of the EU (2001), and increased discussions of the EU as an international actor in the aftermath of September 11 (2001) and the intensified situation in the Middle-East (2002). Moreover, the issues of enlargement of the European Union and institutional reorganization stabilized as key points on the EU agenda bringing along debate over issues such as vote distribution and procedures, the democratic deficit of the Union, its budget and finances, and the structure and role of the Commission. In short, the period under study was a period of time with several key events that contribute to shaping the European economic and political landscape.

Public support for European integration

The developments outlined above have generated heated debates in some European countries. Politicians and interest groups have outlined scenarios of Europe in the future ranging from images of a well-united, harmonious financial world player to versions of a politically integrated ‘United States of Europe’. News media have played a central role in the debates on Europe, some even advocating clear pro or con European integration views such as the partisan British press.

In Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands, the three cases examined in this study, Europe has been a ‘hot issue’ at several points over the last decades. Examples include the large-scale demonstrations prior to the Danish 1972 referendum on joining the EEC and the debates over ‘Europe’ in recent British (1997 and 2001), Dutch (1998), and Danish (1998) national election campaigns (e.g., Andersen, Borre, Goul-Andersen & Nielsen, 1999; Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell & Semetko, 1999; de Vreese, 2001a). The perhaps most striking examples are the violent riots in the streets of Copenhagen succeeding the 1993 referendum on the Edinburgh Treaty. For the first time since World War II national authorities opened fire on a demonstrating public. Memorable examples of EU-debates include the quota systems for agriculture and the fisheries, guidelines for the production and dissemination of cultural goods, the centralized
approval of size and curve of cucumbers and the 1999 resignation of the European Commission based on allegations of fraud, corruption, and incompetence, leaving the European Union without a daily management.

'The European House', as former Chairman of the European Commission, Jacques Santer, labeled the integrating Europe, will neither be truly European nor have any resemblance to a house, if European citizens do not embrace the idea. European citizens have only limited occasions at which directly to voice their view on the on-going integration. Referendums on the key treaties have only been held in a few countries. National and in particular European elections are opportunities for the electorate to show their (dis)content with European politics. However, the legitimacy of this democratic function is challenged by the lack of authority and competences of the European Parliament and representativity is questioned because so few people vote in European elections, most dramatically seen at the 1999 elections where the overall EU turnout dropped below 50% and turnout was 24% in Britain, 30% in the Netherlands, and 50% in Denmark.'

**Overarching research question**

This study takes a cross-national perspective in the investigation of the role of news and information for the process of opinion formation in the context of European integration. A study of this process in only one country would not allow for inferences about the situation elsewhere and would hamper the generalizability of the findings. Three European countries are included in the analysis: Britain, renowned as one of the most euro-skeptic countries, Denmark, at best 'lukewarm' towards advanced integration, and the Netherlands, a traditionally pro-European country. These three countries constitute the basis for studying the dynamics between news media production, content, and the formation of public opinion about Europe. Obviously an even more elaborate cross-national design would be preferable. As argued below, however, the combination of investigations of production, content, and effects with any cross-national perspective is an extension of our current knowledge.

The study focuses on the particular role of television news. In terms of audience responses to television news about European integration we have only limited knowledge though television is the main source of information for a majority of citizens in Europe (e.g., Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). With the exception of a study of television in the 1979 European election campaign (Blumler, 1983), most studies of the role of media in the process of public opinion formation focus on the written press (e.g., Hoddess, 1997; Kevin, 2001; Werder, 2002). The impact of television news on public attitudes towards European
integration has been largely neglected in previous research, as Gavin (2000) recently concluded.

The concept of framing is central to the research project. Events have little intrinsic value unless embedded in a meaningful framework that organizes and lends coherence to the interpretation of events. Framing, on the one hand, refers to the packaging of information that takes place in the newsroom where journalists must unavoidably select and prioritize to tell a story in the news. Framing, on the other hand, also refers to the ability of message attributes to organize experiences of situations and issues for citizens and rendering certain patterns of thoughts available for the expression of attitudes and opinions. The central research question links the study of television news production processes with analyses of news coverage and investigations of effects on public opinion formation:

What characteristics of the television news production process influence the framing of Europe in the news and what influence does the news have on public opinion about Europe?

This overarching research question is divided into a number of sub-questions. The formulation of expectations and the specific theoretical rationale for each of these questions is discussed after a review of the literature. For now it suffices to say that the study has three main components: the process of framing in the production of news, frames in the news, and framing effects on public opinion. ‘Europe in the newsroom’ investigates the role of framing in the newsrooms of European broadcasters. The organization of the production of news about European affairs, the constraints and challenges facing journalists covering ‘Europe’, and the considerations that go into selecting and packaging news are investigated. ‘Europe in the news’ aims at identifying recurrent structures and frames in news about European integration in a cross-national, comparative fashion. ‘Europe in public opinion’ finally refers to the analysis of the influence of news frames on public perceptions of European affairs.

Trends in public opinion

In democratic systems where decision-makers are kept accountable at elections, surveys and polls have become important ad-hoc indicators about opinions of the electorate (Lavrakas & Traugott, 2000). Public opinion polls are tools to adjust political strategies and policies (Brettschneider, 1997). The issue of European integration is no exception to this pattern and public opinion is monitored closely. Beyond media commissioned polls, regular aggregate-level data on public opinion about issues of European integration is available from,
for example, the Eurobarometer reports. These data show considerable variation and fluctuation in the levels of support for European integration, both in a between-country comparative perspective and in a within-country temporal perspective. Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands are three interesting cases in terms of public support for integration.

In terms of *general support for membership* in the EU, the overall EU average approval rating has fluctuated from 50% to 70% over the past two decades and has been around 50-55% in the past few years (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). Britain is considerably below the EU average with an aggregate-level support for membership of around 40%, reaching a high 50% around 1990 and in the past years being around 30% (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). In Denmark, public support for membership of the EU was below the EU average up until 1992 and has since been equal to the overall EU average so that support currently is around 55-60% (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). Public support in the Netherlands is high, with a stable approval rate of about 70%, which is 15-20 percentage points above the overall EU average.

Looking specifically at *support for the common currency*, the euro consistently had an overall EU wide approval rating of approximately 50%. Between 1998 and 2002 a considerable increase in the approval rating was matched by an equal drop in the opposition to the currency so that the average currently is about 60-70% in the twelve countries participating in the euro (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). The current level of support in the Netherlands is 71%, Denmark 47%, and Britain 27% (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). On the issue of the euro, however, public opinion may change rapidly (de Vreese & Semetko 2002a) and in Britain and Sweden, public opinion is monitored closely in advance of the up-coming referendums on the common currency.

Turning to public *support for the enlargement of the Union*, there is an overall EU average support of about 50% for the enlargement plans (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). Denmark is among the strongest supporters with 69% favoring enlargement while the Netherlands is at 58%, and the British are the most skeptical at 41% (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). Evidence from countries on the ascension list shows support for inclusion in the EU, but a decrease in support in recent years is noticeable (Eurobarometer Candidate, 1, 2002; Kolarska-Bobinska, Doblinska et al., 2001).

In sum, on the aggregate level, the three countries relevant to this study can be situated on a ‘Europe Warm – Europe Cold’ scale. In Britain, public opinion is divided and the country is among the most Europe-skeptic members of the EU, both in general terms and with regard to specific key EU policies such as the common currency and the enlargement. Denmark is ‘lukewarm’ towards advanced integration. On the aggregate level, the support for membership is similar to the EU average. The support for the euro is lower than in most other
countries, which was demonstrated in the 2000 rejection of the euro in a national referendum, but support for EU enlargement is higher than in most other countries. The Netherlands is pro-European, both in terms of general support and in terms of support for key EU policies.

**Factors influencing public opinion about Europe**

Beyond descriptive summaries of developments in public opinion on key European issues, the Eurobarometer reports also outline a number of bi-variate relationships between attitudes towards European integration and, for example, social-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and education. These analyses suggest main effects of gender (men being more supportive of European integration) and education (higher levels of education are associated with being more positive towards the EU). Over time, differences in terms of age, gender, and education have decreased, suggesting that explanations of attitudes towards European affairs must include other predictors than social-demographic data. Extant research investigating the antecedents of attitudes towards European integration can be classified in three groups:

*Political sophistication and values.* The first group of studies examines the relationship between support for European integration and value orientations with regard to economic and political issues (Inglehart, 1970; 1990). Inglehart’s work suggests that political attitudes are shaped by the socio-economic environment during the formative years. The social-economic environment is translated into values and attitudes that persist in adult life. According to Inglehart, Rabier, and Reif (1991), the European Union is a vehicle for economic, political, and social change towards a more egalitarian society which is more attractive to citizens with post-materialist values. In addition, these studies suggest that high levels of political sophistication and awareness enable citizens to identify with a supra-national entity such as the European Union (Inglehart, 1970). This argument is partly supported by Eurobarometer data that suggest that higher levels of knowledge are associated with support for European integration.

*Economic experiences and expectations.* The second group of studies posits that “EU citizens from different socio-economic situations experience different costs and benefits from integrative policy” (Gabel, 1998, p. 336). These studies explain support for European integration in terms of income, education, occupational skills, and proximity to border regions (e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1996; Gabel & Palmer, 1995). The proposition that attitudes towards integration, including the common currency, is driven by economic experiences and evaluations is also shared by Pepermans and Veleye (1998) who found national economic pride and satisfaction to be the a key explanatory variable for support
for the euro across the 15 EU-countries. However, Bosch and Newton (1995) did not find any coherent pattern in their 12-country study of how economic variables may explain support for European unification.

**Domestic politics.** The third group of studies focuses on the effects of domestic political considerations for attitudes towards European integration. This research suggests that attitudes towards European integration are a function of citizens' partisanship and the degree to which their preferred political party is supportive of integration (Franklin, Marsh & Wlezien, 1994; Franklin, van der Eijk & Marsh, 1995). These studies in essence suggest that support for integration is mediated by party affiliation. Along these lines, studies have also suggested that voters' support for integration is conditional upon their support for and evaluation of the incumbent government (Franklin et al., 1995).

Gabel (1998) examined the explanatory value of the different theories of support for European integration using Eurobarometer data from 1978-1992. The data substantiated the claims of all the theories, but he found 'utilitarian consequences', that is the expected economic benefits of integrative policy, to provide the most robust explanation. Political values and sophistication, as proposed by Inglehart (1970, 1990), received only limited support as predictors of support for European integration, while domestic political considerations, in the form of partisanship and government evaluations, were the second most important predictors.

In a study specifically investigating voting behavior (as opposed to general attitudes) in the 1994 European Parliamentary elections, van der Eijk, Franklin, and Oppenhuis (1996) assessed the simultaneous influences of several theories traditionally used to explain party choice. They specified a model where the likelihood of voting for different political parties was regressed on the influence of social cleavages, post-materialist values, ideology, issue voting, government performance, and EU evaluations. They found that preferences for political parties in the European Parliament elections were driven by “parties' political stances and voters' preferences in terms of left/right ideology, issues, and government approval” (van der Eijk et al., 1996, p. 359).

None of the previous studies specifically address the impact of campaigns (in the context of European elections) or news and information (in the context of understanding general attitudes towards the EU). By and large, the impact of media in understanding variation in support for European integration has been neglected. Some studies allude to the impact of the media, such as Hewstone (1986) who discusses the role of the press or Anderson and Weymouth (1999) who analyze the British press coverage of the EU. None of these studies, however, have attempted to formally model the impact of media and communication variables. Moreover, the discussion so far has been focused on the role of the press.
The role of the media. The key question for this study is what role television news plays in shaping public opinion about 'Europe'. Available data suggest that citizens who consult several different media sources are generally more positive towards, for example, the euro than citizens who rely on only one source (Eurobarometer, 50, 1999). Such observations, however, say nothing about the causality of this relationship. Do interested and pro-European citizens turn more to the news media for information? Or does the use of multiple information sources contribute positively to interest and enthusiasm for integration? In addition, such general observations fail to say anything about what information citizens obtain when turning to the news media and about the types of effect this information may have.

 Previous work discussing support for integration has speculated about the role of the media in this process. Norris (2000) offered initial insights into the contribution of news media for, for example, public support for the euro and EU membership. Drawing on survey data from several EU countries, she found a significant effect of the tone of press coverage about the euro on support for the euro and EU membership. This study is an initial indication of a relationship between tone of news and, for example, support for the EU. This investigation, however, focused on the bivariate relationship between the slant of the news and aggregated expressions of public opinion. Controls were only made for cross-national differences, but there was no individual-level investigation. The study was not designed to address the crucial issue of causality in the relationship between media content and citizen responses.

 One study investigated how the information environment, in particular the news media, in a referendum campaign served to crystallize opinion on an issue within the context of a number of other hypothesized influences on the vote (de Vreese & Semetko, 2002c). Drawing on a nationally representative two-wave panel survey and a content analysis of news coverage of the Danish 2000 euro referendum campaign, it was found that exposure to certain media outlets, and the tone of the coverage, influenced how voters made their decision, when controlling for other predictors. These findings emphasize the importance of considering the news and information environment during a campaign and provide a direct link between exposure to the content of specific news outlets and electoral behavior.

 The aforementioned study of a referendum campaign on a European issue considered the role of media content in a specific campaign in one country. With the exception of a study of the 1979 European elections, cross-national investigations of the role of media are rare. The study of the 1979 campaign addressed, for example, the relationship between exposure to different media and campaign evaluations (Cayrol, 1983) and media exposure and learning (Schönbach, 1983). However, these studies offer only discussions of the
bivariate relationships between media exposure and a variety of dependent measures. In sum, studies of attitudes towards European integration have been negligent of the role of the media in this process. Given the characteristics of previous research, cross-national investigations of media production, content, and effects in the context of European integration are important extensions to the research field.

Three political systems, three media systems, three journalistic cultures

The three countries in this study are interesting cases in terms of their varying role in the history of European integration. They also vary substantially with respect to aggregate-level support for future European integration as discussed above. In addition, the countries have several system-level characteristics that define the context in which news about European affairs is produced and consumed. In this perspective it is important to consider key features of the political system, the media landscape, and the ‘journalistic culture’ in which the process takes place (Smetko, de Vreese & Peter, 2000).

Political system. Although Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands are parliamentary democracies in which the Prime Minister is almost always the leader of the largest party in parliament, they represent different political systems. The traditional British de facto two-party system is fundamentally different from the multi-party systems of Denmark and the Netherlands where governance is a coalition issue. The political system in the three countries is characterized by continuity and change. In domestic politics, studies suggest that the alignment between political parties and their voters is decreasing while the number of vote switchers, undecided voters, and strategic voters is increasing (e.g., Andersen et al., 1999; Franklin, Mackie & Valen et al., 1992). In the context of European integration, little is different from the national systems. The party systems in the EU are still essentially organized along the lines of national politics, and no European-level party system has emerged as the result of advanced integration (Mair, 2000).

In addition to the developments in the political system, the relationship between politics and the media has evolved over the past decades. Broadly speaking a transition has taken place in which more assertive journalism was paralleled by politicians’ use of streamlined communication strategies, PR, news managers, and spin-doctors. Journalists have adapted by making the ‘exposure’ of professional political tactics the focus of news stories (Bennett & Entman, 2001; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999; Esser, Reinemann & Fan, 2001; Farrell, 1996; Mancini, 1999; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Newman, 2000; Norris, 2000; Swanson & Mancini, 1996).
While these developments have been addressed in the context of national-level elections in both Europe and the US, little is known about changes in the political culture at the European level. Though a European party system has not emerged, changes at the national level provide reason to believe that the European political institutions have also adapted new strategies and that the media have responded accordingly. Only few studies, however, have investigated the efforts made by EU institutions to deal with public relations and media attention. One study argued that in the wake of the Maastricht treaty, the EU was alarmed by its inability to ‘get its message across’ and launched a program of providing background information and press briefings and increased accessibility to documents (Tumber, 1995). A second study provides a picture of the European Commission’s media communication as poor and incompetent suggesting that ‘fragmented political authority’, a ‘pervading technocratic mindset’, and ‘inadequate staffing’ result in severe communication deficits (Meyer, 1999). The study suggests that the degree of professionalization of politics at the European level might be less prominent compared to the national level. However, the general tendency in a number of European countries is to adapt more advanced technical and organizational modes of communication as well as strategic parameters of professional campaigning (Plasser, Scheucher & Senft, 2000).

Media systems. The changes in political communication discussed above coincide historically with significant changes in the European media landscape in general and broadcasting in particular. Today all countries have full-blown competition in broadcasting and all operate in a dual system, far from earlier public service broadcasting monopolies (McQuail & Siune, 1998).

Britain represents a European frontier in terms of broadcasting and has known a dual system since 1954. The British television news market is highly competitive and dominated by BBC News and ITN. The main evening BBC news bulletin was traditionally at 9 p.m. but moved to 10 p.m. in 2002. It competes head-on with ITN which, after a rescheduling to 6:30 p.m., appeared at 10 p.m. again in 2002.

Denmark was a ‘late arrival’ in the era of deregulated broadcasting. The monopoly of national public broadcaster – the BBC equivalent Denmark’s Radio, DR, (which also broadcasts television) - was challenged as late as 1988 by the launch of the semi-public, semi-private TV2. The national channels have daily news with DR’s ‘TV-Avisen’ at 9 p.m. and TV2’s 7 p.m. ‘Nyhederne’ being the market leaders.

Broadcasting in the Netherlands is a product of Dutch society’s traditionally pillarized structure and is entirely different from Britain and Denmark. Broadcasting associations are organized around religious and societal segments in the
population and are allocated air time according to membership volume (Brants & McQuail, 1997). Commercial television was de facto introduced in the Netherlands in 1989 with RTL broadcasting in Dutch from Luxembourg. The public broadcasters and private RTL4 and RTL5 lead the news market with the public 8 o’clock NOS bulletin and the 7.30 p.m. ‘RTL Nieuws’ being the most widely watched.

To understand the context in which news about European affairs is produced an important question is whether the structural changes outlined above have affected content and the way audiences respond to the diversity in news provision. Over time, from 1971 to 1996, it seems that the share of news and information might have gone down slightly, at least in Denmark and the Netherlands (Norris, 2000, p. 108). However, there are no comparable data available to suggest whether these changes have also been paralleled by changes in the amount of time audiences spend on political and international news. The specific impact on the volume of political news and audiences’ exposure and attentiveness to such news notwithstanding, the fully competitive media market is the backdrop against which news production and content about Europe must be seen.

Journalism. A third and final aspect to consider in cross-national news research is ‘journalistic culture’ (Semetko, 1996). The orientation towards politics and politicians by news people varies greatly in Europe. In two comparative studies of the British and German press, Köcher (1986) suggested that German journalists place more value on opinion whereas their British counterparts see themselves more as transmitters of facts. This finding dovetails with Blumler and Gurevitch’s (in Semetko et al., 1991) description of British television journalists as cautious and reactive. In Spain, a comparative analysis of public service and commercial television news during the 1996 general elections found profound differences in the attitude and approach taken by the two competing news organizations with the public broadcaster being descriptive and non-evaluative and the private broadcaster being analytic and interpretative (Semetko & Canel, 1997). This suggests that news peoples’ orientations differ not only between, but also within countries.

While there is some evidence of how British journalists compare in their orientations towards national politics, this is absent when looking at attitudes towards EU politics. One study investigated the British press corps in Brussels (Morgan, 1995), but this study does not allow for any tentative comparative expectations. In the Danish case, virtually nothing is known about the professional culture and attitudes of journalists. In the Dutch case, recent research suggest that Dutch journalists consider ‘being analytical’ and providing ‘interpretation of the news events’ important when covering politics (Deuze, 2002).
But this general observation tells us little with respect to journalists' attitudes towards covering European affairs.

In sum, this study of television news and public opinion about European integration takes place in a context of transition. The political system is faced with changes in electoral behavior and internationalization of governance. The media landscape has become a competitive market led by a quest for audiences, also for television news. The journalistic approach to politics has evolved parallel with the changes towards professionalization of politics (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001). Within these general trends, Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands represent considerable variation on each of the variables. This is the context in which the findings must be interpreted.

Designing the study

An important impetus for this study is to provide initial insights into how news media may affect public opinion about European integration. Equally important, however, are the questions how news about European affairs is produced and how European affairs are represented in the media. Both questions have received only limited attention in previous research (Gavin, 2000; Semetko et al., 2000). There is little known about the structure and content of economic and political news in a cross-national perspective, let alone in the specific context of European integration. And there is even less known about the effects such coverage might have on public opinion.

CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARATIVE DESIGN. Our understanding of the relationship between news media and public opinion is largely based on national studies, suffering somewhat from "naive universalism" (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990, p. 308) by making generalizations of theoretical propositions and single-country data to different political, cultural, and media systems. Comparative research is labeled communication science's "extended and extendable frontier" (Blumler, McLeod & Rosengren, 1992, p. 3) and has gained in scope and frequency, though comparative designs are still the exception rather than the rule."

Comparative research knows several dimensions, most notably time and space. Comparative studies often contrast findings at different levels, including system-level variables, individual-level variables, and aggregated within-system observations (Przeworski & Teune, 1970). Longitudinal comparative research is often faced with severe problems of comparability. The lack of control over data collection poses great challenges. Researchers are often forced to make concessions and establish "equivalencies" rather than comparing "identical measures" (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990). Comparative research with a cross-
national design (comparisons in space and between cultures) is less vulnerable to these problems. Researchers often have more control of the (systematic) collection of data, though this may be a highly resource demanding matter. Research comparing across countries is faced with other pitfalls in the attempt to interpret findings.

The three countries in this study represent interesting cases in terms of public support for European integration as well as in terms of the differences in political systems, media landscape, and journalism. Whereas it has been argued elsewhere that it will be "more productive to compare dissimilar than similar things – and much more fun" (Blumler et al., 1992, p. 280), the perspective applied in this project is that comparing ‘pears with apples’ may indeed be both interesting and valuable in an exploratory phase, but a certain degree of similarity is required to make comparisons worthwhile and interpretable. Nonetheless, dissimilarity and cross-national variation, as found in the political and broadcasting systems in Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands is of course an essential premise for any insightful comparison. By using the differences in political and media systems, and the knowledge about aggregate-level public opinion as the backdrop for understanding the findings, in other words as independent systemic variables, the investigation of television news’ role in the European integration process is potentially enhanced beyond the level of national parochialism.

**Multi-methodological approach.** Beyond the cross-national design, a second feature of the study is the multi-methodological approach. The project integrates the study of news content with studies of production and effects. Based on investigations of the persuasive effects of media, Hovland (1959) concluded that the effects found depended on the method of measurement. He demonstrated how differently collected data (in that case survey versus experimentation) could be used as evidence of exact opposite hypotheses about the effects of media. He concluded that a test of media effects would need to balance and integrate the strengths of measurement precision and validity offered by each methodological approach (Hovland, 1959).

The plea for multi-methodological designs also refers to investigations combining different phases of communication processes in single studies. Shoemaker and Reese (1996), for example, call for more studies integrating production and effects in an attempt to look at the general picture and not over-simplify the actual communication process. "We cannot fully understand the effects of that version of social reality if we do not understand the forces that shape it" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 258). One example of an integrated design is Neuman, Just, and Crigler (1992, p. 25) who used "content analyses to study
media coverage of issues and depth interviews, surveys, and experiments to study individual conceptualizations and mediated learning”.

The current study draws on interviews and observations in the newsroom to study the production process of news about Europe, content analysis to study the media coverage, and experiments to study the effects of news on public opinion. In the following sections, the various research methods used to address the central research question are introduced. Each method is briefly defined and its relevance to this study is discussed. The specific applications of the different methods as well as the operationalization of key concepts and measures used are discussed in the relevant chapters.

**INTERVIEWS.** The processes underlying news stories are essential for understanding patterns and conventions found in the content, not only during elections, but also in relation to everyday coverage of political and economic issues. Interviews with journalists and editors and newsroom observations are valuable sources for understanding the journalistic sense-making of political affairs, and interviews provide exclusive information about news production processes, work routines, and attitudes held by newsmakers. This stream of research using newsroom observations and interviews has not been at the core of research agendas. Holtz-Bacha (1999, p. 59) argued that this is because “both journalists and politicians do not appreciate people looking over their shoulder”. This observation touches the nerve of research in this tradition. Access to newsrooms is a prerequisite for enhancing our knowledge about news production and the interaction between politicians and the media. Newsroom observations and interviews have merit in themselves, but they are particularly relevant in addition to the ‘content and effects research paradigm’ that prevails in election studies, because they contribute with specific insights about why election news is shaped as it is.

Most European newsroom observations have been carried out in Britain with studies of the BBC coverage of British elections (e.g. Blumler, Gurevitch & Ives, 1978; Blumler, Gurevitch & Nossiter, 1989). Research outside Britain offers comparisons between the production of different national news programs, for example in Germany (Semetko & Schönbach, 1994) and in Spain (Semetko & Canel, 1997). As argued above and elsewhere (Gavin, 2000) there is hardly any previous research available investigating the production of news about European integration-issues. One exception was Noël-Aranda's (1983) survey of broadcasters during the 1979 European elections, but this is the only reference point with regard to the approach by television journalists and editors to news about European integration. The current study makes an attempt to fill some of this gap by drawing on interviews with journalists and editors in a cross-national perspective. ‘Europe in the newsroom’, the first dimension of this
study, is investigated by means of structured interviews with news practitioners in the three countries to examine the organization of the coverage and the key challenges perceived by journalists and editors when reporting Europe, and to investigate how the framing of Europe emerges within the newsroom.

**CONTENT ANALYSIS.** Content analysis of the news coverage of European affairs is the central component of the 'Europe in the news' dimension of this study. A content analysis is a systematic method of research which aims at “making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (Krippendorf, 1980, p. 21). To do so, an appropriate sample of material must be identified and reliable procedures and measures are required.

In this study data were collected during multiple periods in Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands. The multiple rounds of data collection enable comparisons of the coverage of European affairs during key events, elections, and routine periods. To reliably analyze and compare findings across countries and periods, the content analysis is systematic and deductive in nature. That is to say the features of the content analysis were formulated in advance of the analysis on the basis of the existing literature and consequently applied in the analysis. This approach is different from, for example, an inductive approach where content is used to illustrate latent meaning that emerges during the research and is not based on a priori expectations (McQuail, 2000).

The content analysis identifies general and specific characteristics of the news coverage of European affairs. The analysis serves several purposes in the overall study. First, it provides a systematic, cross-national comparative examination of the news coverage with particular attention paid to the framing of European issues as well as the visibility of themes and the presence of different actors in the news. Second, the content analysis provides a valuable data base and source of inspiration for creating stimulus material to be used in experiments (see below). The findings from the content analysis validate and guide the operationalization of the independent variables in the experiments.

PUBLIC OPINION. Although the premise of most studies in political communication is that news media have the ability to influence public opinion, there is little agreement on the nature of these effects (McQuail, 2000). The relative contribution of news to the formation of public opinion is dependent on other media coverage and available information as well as a variety of audiences' characteristics such as the antecedents of support for European integration discussed above. Opinions consist of newly acquired information meeting a set of predispositions in terms of, for example, values and knowledge. Zaller (1992, p. 6) states it succinctly: ‘every opinion is a marriage of information and predisposition’. Public opinion about Europe is the sum of the influence of new informa-
tation, as provided for instance in news media, and existing predispositions, values, and knowledge. To investigate the effects of television news on public opinion about European affairs, experiments were conducted.

Experimentation. The essence of an experiment is the manipulation of the experimental variable under investigation and observation of changes in a dependent variable. Brown and Melamed (1990, p. v) summarize the key principle of experimentation as “the manipulation of a treatment variable (X), followed by observation of a response variable (Y)” (italics in original).

The advantage of experimentation over alternative methods is the knowledge of causation it ideally provides (Jackson, 1992; Kinder & Palfrey, 1993; Neale & Libert, 1986). Correlations found in survey data between, for example, television news viewing and the belief that unemployment is the nation’s most important problem, are insufficient to establish a direct causal relationship between the two observed phenomena. By creating different conditions in experiments, the researcher can isolate and test one variable at a time. To assure that any variation found between the conditions is not caused by differences between the individuals in the conditions, randomization procedures are used. By randomly assigning participants to different conditions, the contaminating influence of other variables is ideally ruled out. Differences in the dependent measures can then with more confidence be ascribed to the systematically manipulated, independent variable.

As a result of the extensive degree of control, internal validity in experimentation is high. One potential disadvantage of experiments is the essentially unnatural environment in which experiments often take place. Problems such as test effects, forced exposure, and alterations in behavior and responses are recognized. However, given the absence of research investigating the effects of news coverage of European integration on the individual level, experimentation is an appropriate and valuable method of investigating such effects. Experiments provide a rigorous test of the impact of particular structures in news coverage on, for example, public perceptions and evaluations of European policies.

Challenges in experimental research with television news. Beyond the more generally applicable criticisms of experimentation, including forced exposure, artificiality, and low external validity, an additional number of challenges pertain to experimental framing research and experimentation with television news. Scholars are often not able to exercise full control over the creation of the stimulus material, i.e. specifically manipulating the independent variable which implies jeopardizing the experimental design (Reeves & Geiger, 1994; Slater, 1991).
Experimental research on the effect of news frames in print news requires attention to the construction of the frames in the composition and wording of a news article. Such studies of effects of press, however, have a number of advantages compared to experimental research involving television news. For print media, the production costs and efforts involved in producing stimulus material are lower than for television news. News articles can be drafted by researchers and validated through supervision of, for example, senior journalists (e.g., Valentino, Buhr & Beckman, 2001a). Most importantly, however, the researcher can meet one of the requirements for genuine experimental research: full control over the manipulation of the stimulus material.

Television production, on the contrary, is expensive, labor intensive, and requires specific technical skills. Scholars have addressed these challenges differently in previous research on framing effects. Iyengar, for example, used news stories that were “actual news reports that had been previously broadcast by one of the three major networks” (Iyengar, 1991, p. 20). Cappella and Jamieson (1997, p. 90) utilized both segments already broadcast, and when these “were clearly of one type or the other, they were left unchanged”. For other stories, the experimental manipulation was created by retaining the original visual material, but changing the introduction and voice-over (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Yet other scholars have utilized already broadcast stories that were deemed to be representative of a specific news frame (e.g., McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997).

The drawback when opting for already broadcast news stories deemed to represent a particular form of framing is that the researcher does not have complete control over the manipulation. While a frame may indeed vary between two news stories, so too may a number of other aspects such as texts, use of footage, valence of the story etc. In other words, a successful isolation of the manipulation of the one independent variable, the news frame, is jeopardized because potentially confounding variables are not kept constant.

An important goal of this project is to address the potential shortcomings of previous research by fulfilling the requirements for conducting experimental research with television news. The news stories used in this study are produced rather than selected as being representative of a particular frame. This ensures full control over the stimulus material, i.e. variation in the manipulation only and exclusion of other, unintended, variation in the material. In addition, it also ensures that participants in the study had not been exposed to the news story in advance of the study. Finally, the experimentally manipulated news story is inserted into a simulated bulletin of the national main evening news which addresses the challenge of using a single stimuli design (Slater, 1991). The specific design of the stimulus material used to address these potential shortcomings in television news research is discussed in chapter 5 and 6.
Outline of the book

In the next chapter (Chapter 2) the concept of framing is introduced. The chapter reviews previous research in the field. A typology and an approach to studying the production, contents, and effects of news in a framing perspective are proposed. Following this chapter, the book continues with its three empirical components. These are reported in chapters 3 to 6. Chapter 3 discusses the production of news about European integration and draws on interviews with newsmakers in Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Chapter 4 reports the findings of a content analysis of the television news coverage of European affairs in the three countries. Chapter 5 reports an experiment conducted to investigate the effects of framing a European issue in the news. Chapter 6 also deals with the effects of framing Europe and reports a second experiment. Chapter 7 summarizes the key findings, attempts to draw both theoretical and practical lessons, and proposes avenues for future research.