Framing Europe: television news and European integration

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Chapter 5

Europe in Public opinion

The effects of the conflict and economic consequences frames on issue interpretation, frame salience, and policy support

This chapter focuses on audience responses to news about European integration. While the previous chapters mapped key features of the production process and how European affairs appear in the news, this chapter and the following one deal with the effects that such coverage may have. This is an investigation of the frame-setting component of the integrated process model of framing as discussed in Chapter 2.

Aggregate-level survey data show that public support for membership of the EU, satisfaction with democracy in the EU, and support for specific EU policies vary among the different member states and that the levels of support fluctuate over time. The assumption in this study is that the media matter in this process. In the studies discussed in this and the following chapter, the impact of news and information is considered at the individual level. In order to better understand aggregate-level fluctuations in public opinion, it is necessary to investigate if and when differences in news content may affect how citizens think about European issues.

Effects of frames in television news. Previous experimental investigations of the effects of news frames have suggested a range of individual-level effects from alterations in issue perception to cynical thinking about politics (see elaborate review of previous studies in Chapter 2). The premise of this line of research is that by means of activation of certain constructs, news can "encourage particular trains of thoughts about political phenomena" (Price et al., 1997, p. 483). This may lead citizens to make use of the considerations and beliefs emphasized by the news in subsequent judgments (Druckman, 2001b; Nelson et al., 1997).

The majority of studies investigating framing effects focus on print media, (e.g., Ball-Rokeach et al., 1990; Price et al., 1997; Shah et al., 1996; Tewksbury et al., 2000; Valkenburg et al., 1999). In terms of audience responses to frames
in *television news*, we have limited knowledge though television is the main source of information for a majority of citizens in the US and Europe (e.g., Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997; Eurobarometer, 56, 2002).

**Framing effects: Conflict and economic consequences.** In framing effects research, the independent variable is typically the news frame. As an independent variable, news frames have been conceptualized and utilized differently in previous experimental studies. Some studies emphasize and document the validity and real-life occurrence of the frames that are investigated through either pre-defined news database word searches (e.g., Domke, et al., 1999) or literature reviews (e.g., McLeod & Detenber, 1999), or, more elaborately, via content analyses of news (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991). The justified argument has been made that a valid study of the effects of news frames must be preceded by systematically collected knowledge about the way events and issues are framed in the news. Along these lines, Cappella and Jamieson (1997) suggested that frames must have identifiable conceptual and linguistic characteristics and be commonly observed in journalistic practice.

The current study investigates the effects of two frames that have been found to be prevalent in political and economic news: the *conflict* frame and the *economic consequences* frame. The conflict frame comes from the observation that news about politics and the economy is often framed in terms of disagreement between, for example, individuals or political parties. In this way of framing the news, controversy and diverging aspects between conflicting parties are emphasized (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Patterson, 1993). The economic consequences frame reflects a “preoccupation with the 'bottom line', profit and loss” (Neuman et al., 1992, p. 63). The economic consequences of an issue are a frequently observed strategy for packaging the news (Graber, 1988; McManus, 1994; Neuman et al., 1992) and news producers use the consequence frame to make an issue relevant to their audience (Gamson, 1992).

Conceptually, the notion of news frames employed in this study is indebted to a definition of a frame as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). This definition is in line with a broader definition of frames (see Chapter 2) and the thoughts offered by political communication scholars (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Druckman, 2001a; Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1991; Kinder & Sanders, 1996; Zaller, 1992). Operationally, the study is in line with Price et al. (1997) and Tankard’s (2001) empirical approach to framing research. These studies suggest that a frame consists of specific elements in a news story which are detached from other information. This means
that a news story can be divided into frame-carrying elements and core parts (Neuman et al., 1992; Price et al., 1997).

In acknowledgement of the potential limitations of previous research, the study has two goals. The first goal is to enhance the validity – both internal and external – of experimental framing research with television news by using realistic and professionally produced stimulus material to test the effects of news frames commonly identified in content analyses of news and journalistic practice. The second goal is to investigate whether frames in television news yield effects similar to what has previously been found for print news.

Frames or Facts: How Audiences Rely on the News Frame. The two first goals of this study center upon gaps in previous research. In addition, the study extends research on framing effects by investigating an aspect of the framing process that previous research has only alluded to but not addressed empirically. Though we know that frames in television news may, for example, generate negativity and cynicism about politics (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) and affect the degree of tolerance extended towards political movements (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Nelson et al., 1997); no study to date, however, has investigated how salient, relatively speaking, a news frame is for understanding an issue. Some studies address the salience of frames. These studies focus on the differential effects of frames according to the weight of a frame in the news and suggest that audiences are more susceptible to frames that are strongly present in the news (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Tewksbury et al., 2000).

This research, however, does not assess the relative salience of the frame compared to other information elements in a news story. For example, if audience members respond to a news story about unemployment, how important are the core facts (e.g., employment rates, number of lay-offs etc.) compared to the frame in such a story?

No study to date has disaggregated a news story into different elements and subsequently assessed the salience of the different elements for understanding an issue. Tankard (2001) suggests that a news frame consists of specific elements, also called framing devices (e.g., the headlines, introductions, lead-outs etc.). This idea concurs with previous studies (e.g., Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Tewksbury et al., 2000). Conceptually, we may conceive these elements of a news story as the frame while other elements may be referred to as core news facts (e.g., answers to the questions of when, where, and who). Some studies explicitly define the news frame as distinct from other elements in the news (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Price et al., 1997). In fact, most other experimental framing studies implicitly apply this conceptual distinction in their operationalizations by keeping a core part constant and varying for example headlines,
opening and closing paragraphs to constitute the framing manipulation (e.g., Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991).

Based on previous research it remains an open question whether citizens pick up more of the news frame or the core facts when conceiving of an issue presented in the news. The third goal of this study is therefore to investigate the relative importance that citizens attach to information pertaining to the frame of a news story compared to the core part.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The scheduled enlargement of the European Union is the backdrop to investigate the effects of the two frames. The issue of the enlargement of the EU was chosen because of its real world importance as a key issue in the future trajectory of European integration. In addition, only very limited work has been conducted on the relationship between news coverage and public perceptions of European affairs and this has not been investigated on the individual level in an experimental context.

Experimental studies of the effects of news frames in print media have suggested that frames such as the conflict and the economic consequences frame have the ability to direct readers' thoughts and define which aspects of an issue they consider particularly important (see Price et al., 1997; Tewksbury et al., 2000; Valkenburg et al., 1999). None of these studies have been able to test the effects of these frames in television news despite the importance of this medium for political information. However, given the consistency of the findings based on print news-based experiments, the first set of hypotheses can be formulated:

- Hypothesis 1a: Television news framed in terms of conflict stimulates and renders conflict related thoughts about an issue.
- Hypothesis 1b: Television news framed in terms of economic consequences stimulates and renders economic consequences related thoughts about an issue.

While studies of framing effects have assessed the impact of news frames on a variety of attitudinal, cognitive, and evaluative measures (see Chapter 2), no study to date has investigated the relative salience of a news frame for understanding a news story. As discussed above, there has been some work conducted on the differential effects of frames according to the weight of a frame in the news suggesting that audiences are more susceptible to frames that are strongly present in the news (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Tewksbury et al., 2000). These studies, however, do not address the relative salience of the frame compared to other information in a news story. It therefore remains an open question whether viewers pick up more of the news frame than of the core news facts.
when conceiving of an issue presented in the news. For an initial exploration of this, the following research question was formulated:

- Research question 1: What is the relative importance of the news frame compared to the core information/news facts in a news story?

Finally, the study investigates the effects of framing of the enlargement issue on support for European integration. Nelson and Oxley (1999) contrasting an 'environmental' versus an 'economic' framing of a land development dispute found that participants exposed to the economic frame considered economic beliefs more important which led to endorsement of the land development plan. Conversely, participants exposed to the environmental frame considered environmental beliefs more important which led to an unfavorable evaluation of the plan. Tewksbury et al. (2000) found that news frames affected attitudes towards restricting hog farms. These studies contrast frames that emphasize either pros or cons of an issue. The economic consequences frame and the conflict frame do not have inherent valence and given the scarcity of research on the effects of frames on policy support, a research question was formulated:

- Research question 2: Does exposure to news framed in terms of conflict or economic consequences affect the level of support for European integration?

Method

Experimental research on the effects of television news frames. To investigate the hypotheses and the research questions, an experiment was conducted. Experimental research is often criticized for low external validity, but is considered superior in an attempt to investigate effects of a key independent variable (Kinder & Palfrey, 1993). Paraphrasing Chapter 1, the following problems have been identified as pertinent to experimental research in communication science. First there is a problem of external validity in terms of not sufficiently concise operationalizations of the independent variable. Second there is the selection of messages to represent variance on one variable without controlling for other, unintended systematic differences which may endanger the internal validity of the experimental design. Third there is the problematic nature of single message stimuli where the effects of messages are tested without an appropriate context which increases the artificiality of the experimental situation (Reeves & Geiger, 1994; Slater, 1991).

An important goal of the present study is to address the potential shortcomings of previous research by fulfilling the requirements for conducting experimental research with television news. First, the independent variable explored in this study – the conflict and the economic consequences news frame – is theoretically grounded. The frames have been shown to occur through several con-
tent analyses of political and economic news. Second, 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. Third, the experimentally manipulated news story is inserted into a simulated bulletin of a national main evening news program which addresses the challenge of using a single stimuli design.

**Sample.** A sample of one hundred and forty-five (n=145) participants was randomly drawn from the database of the *NOS KLO* Audience Research Department. Participants were recruited to reflect the composition of the adult Dutch population and to eliminate potential biases based on demographic differences as previous research has suggested that women, middle-aged, and less educated persons are less enthusiastic about European integration (e.g., Eurobarometer 48, 1998; Gabel, 1998). The sample is not representatives but is considered preferable to a homogeneous convenience sample. The sample consisted of 46% females, the age of the participants ranged from 16 to 65 ($M = 39.9$, $SD = 12.5$), and the education level varied from primary school (age 12 in the Netherlands) to university degree.

**Stimulus material.** Various scholars have stressed the necessity of utilizing realistic material in experimental research with television news (e.g., Brosius, Donsbach & Birk 1996; Graber, 1990; Reese, 1984). To improve the external validity of the study, the stimulus material used in the experiment was produced in cooperation with the national Dutch public broadcaster, *NOS Journaal*, which produces the most widely watched main evening news bulletin in the Netherlands. The assistance of *NOS* in terms of providing access to archival footage, editing facilities as well as assigning reporters and correspondents to participate in the production of stimulus material exclusively for this experiment cannot be underestimated.

A news bulletin was produced with the characteristics of the regular 8 o’clock news [8 uur Journaal], including the nation-wide known anchorwoman, and according to common practices at *NOS Journaal* in terms of style of reporting and technical standards (see Figure 5.1). Within the bulletin, the experimentally manipulated news story was placed as story number two which is in line with editorial practices for the priority of routine political/economic stories which are less likely to lead the bulletin. For the experiment, new footage was recorded, new interviews were held, and new stories were constructed.
The experimental news story dealt with the enlargement of the European Union. The focal point of the news story was the (simulated) publication of a report by the European Commission encouraging a fast entry of Poland into the European Union. The simulation of this plausible event ensured that all participants would be confronted with new information in a story that had not been broadcast previously. Two different versions of the experimental news story were produced. One contained a 'conflict frame', the other an 'economic consequences' frame. Both stories consisted of an identical core section and for each of the two experimental framing conditions, the final part of the news story was designed to establish one of the two frames. This design of the stimulus material, with a core section containing the news facts and a section in which the frame emerges, is consistent with earlier framing experiments (see e.g., Iyengar, 1991; Price et al., 1997).
First, the anchor introduced the story. The core part of the news story provided background information about the history of the European Union developing from a 1950s Steel and Coal Community to a 1990s Economic and Monetary Union. The core part also addressed the current plans of the EU to expand with a number of Eastern European countries, including Poland.

The story framed in terms of conflict then continued with a clash of opinion between two members of Parliament about the desirability of an accelerated ascension process. The two MPs, Weisglas (Liberal Party, VVD) and Timmermans (Labor Party, PvdA) from the two governing parties in the Netherlands in May 2000, stated opinions that are in line with the official party policies. However, their actual quotes had been scripted in advance specifically for the experiment.

The story framed in terms of economic consequences continued after the core part to address the potential economic and financial ramifications of an early entrance of Poland in the EU. The potential repercussions for Dutch taxpayers were emphasized. These effects were stated by Nout Wellink, the President of the Dutch Central Bank, who had also received a script with his quote formulated along the lines of the Bank’s standpoint on this issue.

The experimental story had a domestic focus and included domestic actors which is in line with the findings of the content analysis of characteristics of Europe-news presented in Chapter 4. It is important to note that the core parts by far constitute the largest part of the story and that the framing manipulation pertains to specific elements only.

**Design.** The experiment used a two x two factorial design. For both the conflict and the economic consequences story, two versions were made. One contained a traditional field report with visuals and an accompanying voice over, the other a live cross-talk between the anchor in the NOS studio and the Brussels-based EU-correspondent. The differences in format pertained to the visual side of the news stories only while the audio side (the script) was kept identical. One version was in the form of a speak accompanying visuals and short quotes (field report), the other in the form of a scripted live interview with the Brussels correspondent (cross-talk). The two versions were produced to investigate the impact of format differences on news learning and appreciation. The findings suggested that live cross-talks do not, contrary to common assumptions, enhance recall or appreciation of news. This, however, is not the focus of the present study and the format differences are reported and discussed in detail elsewhere (Snoeijer, de Vreese & Semetko, 2002).

In the presentation of the results, the current study is treated as a single factorial design with framing condition as the factor. In all analyses, control for possible interaction effects between the experimental framing condition and
format condition was completed. Format or the interaction between format and framing condition did not yield significant effects on the dependent measures in any of the analyses which is why it, for purposes of clarity in the data presentation, is appropriate to consider it a single factorial design.

**Procedure.** Participants were invited to the headquarters of the Audience Research Department to participate in a study of television news. The experiment was conducted on four weeknights in May 2000. Participants were reimbursed for their travel costs and they received a gift voucher at the value of approximately 16 euro. As the participants arrived, they were randomly assigned to different conditions/ viewing rooms. A control group was not included in this post-test only, between-subjects experimental design. The viewing rooms were identical and participants watched the news bulletin in groups ranging in size from 8 - 12 persons. The experimental leaders were randomized between the different conditions and viewing locations. They had received extensive briefing and a manual in writing to eliminate any bias caused by the experimental leader.

The participants were informed that the study was about their “experience of television news”. They were told that the study would involve them watching a proof taping of today’s 8 o’clock News [*8 uur Journaal*], taped in the late afternoon of that day, and completing a questionnaire. An initial questionnaire addressed the participants’ demographics, interest in news and current affairs, media use, political preference, and general political knowledge. A pre-test as such was not appropriate for this study as a pre-test could cue participants to watch the news in a specific manner. After viewing the experimental news bulletin, the participants received three questionnaires in numbered envelopes. Each participant filled in one questionnaire at a time and left these in individually sealed envelopes immediately after filling them in. Given the small group size, the experimental leader easily monitored the participants’ compliance with this guideline. Upon completion of the final questionnaire participants were debriefed.

**Measures. Issue interpretation.** To test the effect of the conflict and the economic consequences frames on viewers’ cognitive responses, thought-listing procedures were used. The question wording was: “We are interested to hear how you think about the issue of the enlargement of the European Union. You have just seen a news story in ‘Het Journaal’ about the enlargement. We are interested to hear all your thoughts and feelings about this issue. Please list all your thoughts about the enlargement”. This open procedure, known from social psychology, has successfully been employed in previous experimental research on the effects of frames in the news (e.g. Iyengar, 1991; Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al.,
1999) as well as in survey-based framing research (Sotirovic, 2000). The technique is preferred to tap interpretations and perceptions of issues above closed and pre-defined measures which have the inherent risk of reflecting the researchers' presuppositions and eliminating aspects provided in the responses that were not anticipated a priori (Shapiro, 1994).

To determine the extent to which the two news frames emerged in the responses provided by the participants, measures used in an earlier study of the effects of news frames in print media were adapted (see Valkenburg et al., 1999). The thoughts listed by the participants were analyzed by means of nine items, each designed to capture the presence of a dimension of a news frame. Examples of these questions are: “Does the answer reflect disagreement between parties/individuals/groups?” (conflict frame), “Does the answer mention the costs/degree of expense involved?” (economic consequences frame).

All questions were asked to the thoughts of each individual. The questions were coded as yes (1) or no (0). The coding was completed by a student, blind to the experimental condition. A second coder double-coded all the open-ended responses yielding a satisfactory inter-coder reliability with Cohen’s K ranging from .63 to .92 for the conflict items and .84 to .95 for the economic consequences items. Scales were created for each of the two frames by averaging the scores on the questions defining the frame. The value on the scales ranged from .00 (frame not present) to 1.00 (frame present). A high score indicated strong presence of that frame in the thoughts listed. Cronbach’s α for the conflict frame scale was .56 and for the economic consequences scale .64.

Salience of news frame. To measure the relative importance of the frame in the news compared to the core information, an open-ended free account procedure asking participants to retell the story to a person who has not seen the story him/herself was employed. This procedure has been used successfully in previous studies to explore which aspects of a story a respondent considers most salient (e.g., Graber, 1990). The responses to this open, unaided account of the story were coded by means of a grading scheme through which each participant was assigned a score for information pertaining to the frame and a score for information pertaining to the core facts in the story. The text of each news story was divided into units containing the frame and the core news facts. Participants received 0.5 point for mentioning half of any unit and 1.0 point for mentioning the entire unit. For example, if a participant named three of the countries on the ‘entry list’ to the EU, the participant received 0.5 point whereas a participant listing all six countries in the first entry group would receive 1.0 point for that particular unit. Each participant was assigned a total score for the core part of the story and for the framed part of the story by averaging the number of points received. Each score consequently ranged between .00 and 1.00.
Support for European integration. To test the effect of the two frames on support for advanced European integration, three items forming a scale of 'EU support' was used. The three items, measured on a five-point Likert agree-disagree scale, tapped the degree of support for advanced European integration. The three items formed a scale of support for European integration with $\alpha = .79$.

Other variables. In addition to the effect of the news frame on the issue interpretation, other variables were expected to affect the nature of participants’ cognitive responses. Specifically, political knowledge and the degree of issue elaboration was expected to influence the responses (Price et al., 1997; Rhee, 1997) as discussed in Chapter 2. Accordingly these variables were included in the analysis. Political knowledge was measured by eight factual questions, averaged to range from 0 to 1 ($M = .61, SD = .28$) ($\alpha = .78$). As suggested by Rhee (1997), the participants’ degree of elaboration on the issue was measured by verbosity, i.e. the number of words participants listed for the open-ended measure ($M = 40.5, SD = 25.5$). For the analysis of support for European integration, gender, age, education, political interest (one five-point scaled item), and political knowledge were included.

Data analysis. To test the first set of hypotheses two separate ANOVAs with conflict versus economic consequences frame as main factor were carried out. To assess the influence of the control variables, two separate analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were carried out with conflict versus economic consequences frame as main factor and political knowledge and issue elaboration as covariates. To investigate the first research question, two paired sample t-tests were carried out because RQ1 addresses a within-condition effect. In addition, two ANCOVAs with conflict versus economic consequences frame as fixed factor and political knowledge and issue elaboration as covariates were used. To investigate the second research question, an ANCOVA with conflict versus economic consequences frame and gender as fixed factors and age, education, political interest, and political knowledge as covariates was used.

Moreover, to control for main effects of framing (conflict versus economic consequences), format (cross-talk versus field report) or interaction effects between format and framing on the dependent variables, MANOVAs were carried out. As mentioned above, these tests did not yield any effects of format or interaction between frame and format which is why the rest of the analyses are completed with a one factorial design.
Results

The effect of news frames on issue interpretation. The hypotheses suggested that the conflict and the economic consequences would influence participants' train of thoughts. To investigate the effects of the news frames on participants' thoughts, the thought-listing procedure was utilized. Table 5.1 shows that participants in the conflict condition \((M = .26)\) used more conflict related thoughts than economic consequences thoughts \((M = .05)\) \((F(1, 144) = 48.65, \eta^2 = .25, p < .001)\). Similarly, participants in the economic consequences condition reflected the experimentally induced frame in their thoughts \((M = .39)\) and hardly used any thoughts related to conflict or disagreement \((M = .05)\) \((F(1, 144) = 87.79, \eta^2 = .38, p < .001)\).

Table 5.1. Use of frames in thoughts by experimental condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental condition</th>
<th>Conflict ((n=73))</th>
<th>Economic consequences ((n=72))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of conflict related thoughts</td>
<td>.26a (.24)</td>
<td>.05b (.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of economic consequences related thoughts</td>
<td>.05b (.08)</td>
<td>.39a (.29)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Cell entries are means, entries in parentheses are standard deviations. Means with different subscript are significantly different \((p < .001)\).

Figure 5.1. Interpretation of enlargement issue by experimental condition
Figure 5.1 shows these findings graphically. Participants in the conflict condition displayed much more of the conflict frame in their thoughts than economic consequences considerations. Conversely, participants in the economic consequences condition displayed much more of the economic consequences frame in their thoughts than conflict-related considerations.

**Covariates.** Introducing the covariates did not significantly alter the results of in any of the conditions. Table 5.2 shows that the effect of exposure to conflict framed news remained significant ($F(1, 144) = 72.95$, partial $\eta^2 = .34$, $p < .001$) as did exposure to economic consequences framed news ($F(1, 144) = 82.59$, partial $\eta^2 = .37$, $p < .001$) after adjustments for the covariates. Political knowledge was a positive covariate but did not significantly alter the results in either of the conditions. The number of words used by participants positively affected the dependent measure for both the conflict ($\beta = .03$, $t(144) = 5.78$, $p < .001$) and the economic consequences condition ($\beta = .03$, $t(144) = 3.36$, $p < .01$).

### Table 5.2. ANCOVA of conflict and economic consequences interpretations of EU enlargement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Covariate</th>
<th>Conflict interpretation</th>
<th>Economic consequences interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>Partial $\eta^2$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>34.43 ***</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>72.95 ***</td>
<td>.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>(141) (0.26)</td>
<td>(0.48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 145$ (conflict = 73; economic consequences = 72). Numbers in parentheses are mean square errors. *** $p < .001$.

**The salience of news frames versus other information in the news.** The first research question addressed the relative importance of the news frame compared to other information in the news story. To investigate this, the free account procedure was employed and the responses were coded for presence of information pertaining to either the frame or the core parts of the story. Table 5.3 presents the mean scores for presence of information pertaining to the core part and information pertaining to the news frame by condition (ranging from 0 to 1).

Because the research question deals with a within-condition effect, namely the presence of information pertaining to the news frame compared to information pertaining to the core news facts, two paired sample t-tests were conducted. No significant difference was found in the level of presence of information pertaining to the frame and information pertaining to the news
facts, neither for the comparison within the conflict condition ($\hat{r}(72) = -0.63, p = 0.53$) nor for the comparison within the economic consequences condition ($\hat{r}(71) = -1.50, p = 0.14$). In other words, as Table 5.3 shows, to the participants, the news frame was as important as the news facts presented in the core part when retelling the news story in their own words.14

Table 5.3. Reference to information pertaining to news frame versus other information by experimental condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental condition</th>
<th>Conflict (n=73)</th>
<th>Economic consequences (n=72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reference to core news facts</td>
<td>0.38 (0.35)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to news frame</td>
<td>0.42 (0.47)</td>
<td>0.47 (0.39)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Cell entries are means, entries in parentheses are standard deviations.

**Covariates.** In addition, as shown in Table 5.4, an ANCOVA revealed no main effect of framing condition for referring to core elements ($F(1, 144) = 1.44$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$, $p = 0.19$) suggesting that the two conditions elicited a similar amount of references to information from the core part of the news story (conflict condition $M = 0.38$ and economic consequences condition $M = 0.47$). Verbosity ($F(1, 144) = 7.46$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$) and political knowledge ($F(1, 144) = 40.08$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.22$, $p < 0.001$) contributed positively to making reference to the core information in the news story. For making reference to the frame elements, two ANCOVAs revealed a main effect of framing condition.15 Introducing the covariates did not alter this relationship, but suggested in addition that the more politically knowledgeable and participants offering greater issue elaboration were more likely to make use of the news frame. This finding was statistically significant in the conflict condition.16

Table 5.4. ANCOVA of salience of core information and news frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salience core information</th>
<th>Salience news frame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflict (n=73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covariate</td>
<td>$df$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political knowledge</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main effect</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frame</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 145 (conflict = 73; economic consequences = 72). Numbers in parentheses are mean square errors. * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$. ** * $p < .01$, *** * $p < .001$. 

The effect of news frames on support for European integration. The second research question addressed the impact of the two news frames on support for European integration. Participants in the conflict condition ($M = 3.3$, $SD = .96$) and participants in the economic consequences condition ($M = 3.2$, $SD = .96$) did not differ in their support for European integration. Inclusion of the covariates yielded a significant effect of political interest on support for European integration ($F(1, 137) = 4.41$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The study showed that frames in television news have the ability to direct the thoughts of viewers when conceiving of a contemporary political issue. It was found that participants exposed to a news story inserted in a bulletin of the national evening news and framed in terms of conflict or economic consequences expressed thoughts about the issue that reflected how the news was framed. Participants who watched a story framed in terms of the potential economic consequences of the enlargement of the European Union displayed thoughts in which this specific spin on the issue was present. The thoughts addressed costs, benefits, and financial implications of the enlargement of the European Union. Participants who watched the story framed in terms of a party conflict over the enlargement issue displayed thoughts referring to the public and political friction over the issue, often including more and opposing points of views in their thoughts.

In addition, the study showed that participants who elaborated in their interpretation of the issue were more likely to reflect the frame presented to them in the news in their responses. In other words, verbose persons, who reflect more elaborately on an issue, were more likely to use the frame as a resource. Political knowledge was also a positive, albeit not statistically significant covariate suggesting that political knowledge contributes to making use of the news frame in the interpretation of issues. These findings emphasize the importance of considering individual characteristics in understanding the process of framing effects (e.g., Neuman et al., 1992; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Rhee, 1997).

The effects of the news frames found in this study of television news are supportive of previous studies of the impact of conflict and economic consequences frames in print news (Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Taken together these studies point towards a certain robustness in the effects of the conflict and economic consequences frames. The effects have been found in different national contexts, for both television (this study) and the press (Price et al., 1997; Valkenburg et al., 1999), in relation to high salience issues (such as increasing
tuition fees for a student sample), and with respect to the less personally obtrusive political-economic issue of the enlargement of the European Union.

The first research question addressed the relative importance of a news frame compared to other information in a news story and found that the news frame is equally important to core facts in the news. Moreover, the study suggested that the more politically knowledgeable and the participants offering greater issue elaboration were more likely to make reference to both the core information and the news frame than less knowledgeable and less elaborate participants. These findings also stress the importance of individual-level differences for understanding framing effects and specifically the results suggest – in line previous research (e.g., Hsu & Price, 1993; Rhee & Cappella, 1997) – that knowledge facilitates a deeper and more sophisticated information processing.

While the relative importance of a news frame had not yet been investigated, this study suggests that the salience of news frames is an area in need of further research. Extant media effects literature has discussed salience as a dependent variable (e.g., agenda-setting research assessing the salience of audiences’ issues) or salience as an independent variable (e.g., priming research where the salience of certain considerations drive evaluations of political leaders). Scheufele (2000, p. 309) concludes that agenda-setting and priming rely on the same mechanisms whereby the media “increase the salience of issues or the case with which these considerations can be retrieved from memory […] to make political judgments about political actors”. Framing, he argues, is inherently different and affects how audiences think about an issue “not by making aspects of the issue more salient” (Scheufele, 2000, p. 309).

However, other framing researchers argue that “framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Scheuflle’s (2000) argument that salience per se makes an agenda-setting or priming study and that attribution is the theoretical premise of framing challenges existing research where these terms are used interchangeably. In framing research, Nelson et al. (1997) and Druckman (2001a) have demonstrated how frames make certain considerations more salient for subsequent judgments. News frames affect attitudes by stressing specific values, facts or other considerations and endowing them with greater relevance to an issue than under an alternative frame. Tewksbury et al. (2000) found evidence that the degree of presence – the weight or salience – given to a frame in the news affected the relative emphasis given to this frame in readers’ interpretation of a local policy issue. Previous research, as well as this study, suggests that salience is a concept relevant to framing research. Given the terminological inconsistencies in extant research, however, Scheufele’s (2000) call for precision and the need to specify and expli-
cate not only antecedents of, but also the labeling of the dependent variables remains eminent.

A question for future research is what roles *news facts* and the *news frame* play when new information about the same issue is processed. Information processing theory suggests that retrieval of information depends on what is accessible which in turn is influenced by the recency and frequency of activation (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). The effects of news frames may in fact emerge more strongly and with more implications in later processes of retrieving information when the frame is activated and certain inferences about an issue or event are encouraged.

The second research question asked whether the two news frames elicit different levels of support for future European integration. The study showed no difference in the policy support between the two conditions. Previous research has demonstrated significant effects of different frames on, for example, political tolerance (McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Nelson et al., 1997) and support for local political issues (Nelson & Oxley, 1999; Tewksbury et al., 2000). A plausible explanation for the lack of effect on support for European integration in comparison with these aforementioned studies could be the nature of the issue under study. Previous research has focused on controversial rather than routine political and economic issues. Issues such as social protests and local politics might be more personally obtrusive and controversial in the news than the enlargement of the European Union. This explanation dovetails with Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) who in a study of media bias perception found effects only for a controversial, evocative issue and not for a routine political issue. This explanation, however, is of course tentative.

Beyond the implications for framing research the current study also addresses issues important to scholars, news practitioners, and politicians. First, a focal point for all previous studies of framing effects is the focus on short-term effects. Future research should address the effects of news frames on public opinion in a temporal perspective. This would require a more elaborate non-experimental research design or a delayed post-test with repeated dependent measures. One attempt at investigating the longevity of effects is discussed in Chapter 6. Second, the experimental bulletin used in this study points to the potential fruitful cooperation between practitioners from news organizations and academia. Third, the study suggests that news frames are influential in shaping an individuals' direction of thoughts on a political issue. Previous research has demonstrated that public opinion about European issues is highly volatile and that support can be changed by simple wording differences in questionnaires (Saris, 1997). With television news consistently listed as the most important source of information for citizens across Europe when receiving information about European issues (Eurobarometer 56, 2002), the framing of
news about ‘Europe’ plays an important role in contributing to public opinion formation over issues such as the enlargement of the European Union.

In the next chapter the relationship between exposure to news coverage about European issues and public opinion is explored further.