

# News Construction on the Pivots of Framing and Ideology: A Theoretical Perspective

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## Abstract

This paper reviews framing and the concept of ideology as imperatively intertwined theory in the construction of news by the media. It further explores each theory as independent media pivot in news making, and presents their coupling as a consequence of the inevitable link. The paper also interrogates the two- framing and ideology- as connected concepts that are rarely interrogated in media studies but nevertheless influence the construction of new stories. The paper further indicates that the coupling of the concepts is further grounded on the social construction theory, positioning the argument that news production and its consequential framing is based on constructivism. The paper contends that when such mode of construction becomes embedded, reified and routinised in the newsroom, a journalistic ideology is forged and established that, consequentially, provides deterministic dominant modalities through which events, issues and personalities are framed and understood by the media. In particular, where the voices of the elites, through the journalist's appropriation of official discourses, become the sustaining dominant, authentic, credible, and authoritative voices of news framing and construction, a news framing ideology becomes established; and all events, policies, and issues become constrained of extra interpretation except that which suits the journalistic ideological cause.

**Keywords:** framing, ideology, news construction, media, official discourses, journalistic ideology

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## 1.0 Introduction

The mass media are the fulcrum between government policy agendas and the public (Collins et al, 2006; Soroka 2002). According to Collins et al. (2006), the major channel through which government policy enters the public domain is through the media. Through this channel people learn about government plans and initiatives, and public understanding of a policy can become dependent on the degree of coverage accorded that policy by the media (Collins et al. 2006; Davidson et al. 1999; Miller et al.1998; D'Angelo, 2018). Chomsky and Hermann (1988) have noted that the "mass media serve as a system for communicating images to the general populace" (p.16). Through this system of communication, the mass media are able to perform their role of providing information for individuals by encouraging them to adopt the cultural norms that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. The media have been cited as a significant force on groups and individuals that occupy the apex of political and economic power. The argument is that the media communicate directly to those who wield power and exert pressure on policy makers and, through that mechanism, stimulate public debate on policy issues (Schudson, 2011; Wallack, 1994). According to Schudson (2011), through journalists "have the opportunity-in fact the professional obligation to frame the message." (p. 23). Through this stimulation of debate, the media emphasize alternative definitions of problems and the varying policy approaches through which solution to those problems can be attained. Therefore, the mass media serve as the source of information flow for public policy issues, and determine the ground upon which public opinion get shaped on those policy initiatives. When the mass media engage in news production for public consumption, they by that function circulate knowledge which helps to influence people's opinions about issues. (Collins et al. 2006; Druckman & Nelson 2003; Tuchman, 1978). The media emphasize issues by bringing them into the domain of public sphere. Van Dijk (1993) has stated that the media have always wielded some form of social power which has the potential of controlling the minds of readers or viewers. He continued that through news production the media provide knowledge to their audiences and such knowledge become crucial in the determination of discourse direction and understanding. The social power wielded by the media therefore allows them to control knowledge and for that matter discourse. He states, "The strategic control of knowledge is a crucial element in the control of discourse understanding and, therefore, of discourse access and the critical counter power of oppositional reading and understanding" (van Dijk, 1993: p.15) The media have always been used to provoke debates on specific policy issues with the idea that such arenas can act as the space to fine-tune government policies. Media professionals have become very important instruments in the construction and dissemination of policies and issues. They also influence public policy development by putting issues on their news agenda. Such news coverage of important policies can legitimize the problem so that greater percentage of the population will support efforts in finding solutions to the issues raised (Walt-Chiders, 1994). This view is supported by political science research that has documented that the media play a very significant role in shaping how issues come before policy makers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993). In many social settings the mass media can shape public opinion on policy initiatives to the extent that the public, through

the same medium can in turn influence the developmental processes of the policy issue (Collins et al. 2006; Iyengar, 1997; Soroka, 2002a). In varying situations and forms, citizens who are conscious about public policy issues draw on the media as the source of information and education so that they “will become more informed about the issues and events of the day” (Iyengar, 1997: p. 212). Research has also shown that mass media contents that come in the form of news stories on social issues are resources that the public could utilize to foster positive social change (Dorfman et al., 2005; Varga & dePyssler, 1999). The extent to which the public or the policy-conscious citizen can become well informed is intrinsically yoked to the accuracy and the quality of the news story. Several factors mediate between the release of a public policy and the final media representation that is put in the public domain (Kitzinger, 1999; Miller, Kitzinger, Williams & Beharell, 1998). Since different and competing media houses abound within particular media landscapes, differences in news reportage can generate different reactions and responses from public (Alasuutari, 1999). Based on political or ideological inclination, such as being conservative or liberal, media houses tend to report events in support of or in opposition to their identified ideological propensity. Furthermore, with the coverage of a particular news story being put into the public domain, the media always select a few salient issues from within the range of issues that are available in the real-world situation (Bruggemann, 2014; D’Angelo, 2018; Gans, 1979; Nelkin, 1995). In other situations, the nature of media ownership (government owned/ controlled, private-owned/controlled) determines the extent to which the media can become useful for information dissemination and developmental processes (Asante, 1996; Ziegler & Asante, 1992).

## **2.0 The social construction of news**

One of the central tenets of social theory and research is the construction of social reality. According to social theorists, the construction of social reality is an outcome of the active involvement of individuals in interpersonal relationships (Fiske, Taylor, 1987; Jussim, 1991). Through these complex interaction individuals become active participants in the social process and through such engagement construct their own social realities. One assumption of this constructivist perspective is that individual perception of reality does not only create social reality but also becomes a reflection of social reality (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Miller & Turnbull, 1986; Snyder, 1984). The constructivist perspective also acknowledges the fact that individual engagement in the social process may generate perceptions, biases, beliefs, and prejudices that in themselves may be factual, inaccurate or erroneous. However, these factors, according to social theorists (Higgins & Bargh, 1987; Jussim, 1991), do not by themselves negate the power of individuals to construct their own social realities. The media are generally seen as important constituents in the determination of how events and conditions of individual group experiences are socially defined (Gamson & Modigliani 1999; Stallings 1990). This mode of seeing the media is in tandem with the social constructivist perspective that projects media conceptualization of news as a direct reflection (and perhaps creation) of social realities (Spencer, & Triche, 1994). This social constructivist perspective of news emanates from how the media make such news, and their anticipation of how the audience receives the news. In this process, the media construct news based on their social knowledge, and generally, on the kind of social knowledge expected to be wielded by their audience. The active construction of news by the media, and the consequential interpretations and negotiations of the resultant text is the outcome of individual complex social interactions (Neuman, Justy & Crigler, 1992; Rhee, 1997). Several factors go into the news production processes to determine the newsworthiness of an event. The criteria include relevance; proximity; negativity; recency; timeliness; and, novelty (Fishman, 1980; Turner, 1982; vanDijk, 1988). Other writers have expanded the newsworthiness of an event to include frequency, threshold, intensity, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, predictability, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, and the deviant construct of the occurrence being reported (Hester, 1973; Shoemaker, Chang & Brendlinger, 1986, 1987). Any criteria of news worthiness claim its relevance from the manner through which the story reinforces social reality and adequately shapes the opinions of individuals and groups on the particular subject. The processes involved in the production of news such as the use of news sources, selection of stories and the exclusion of others and the media specificity of providing definitions for events and conditions that resonate with subjects of the social milieu are deeply cast in a social constructivist mold (Durham, 1998; Stalling 1990; Spencer, & Triche, 1994). If news making is socially constructed because it is a product of the social milieu, then it is imperative that any form of news must bear resemblance to and indeed signify a strong reflection of the cultural images embedded in the local environment. This must be construed to mean that news making by the media is a direct outcome of their sensitivity to local issues and concerns, their preference for traditions and normative predispositions that arise from their reporting practices, and a deference to the needs of their consumers as socially captive cohorts in their joint duty of using the locally produced cultural images as their frameworks to define particular events and conditions. A contextualization of this proposition means that these cultural frameworks then become tools or interpretive devices for media and their audiences/readers to define occurrences as particularized events of considerable significance (Fishman, 1980; van Dijk, 1988). Through the use of these socially constructed frameworks as interpretive devices, events and occurrences achieve their newsworthiness and their social relevance. Flowing

from this point of view is the inference that many news reports receive considerable attention because events described in the narrative or news contents assume the characteristics of the local cultural images that may have the consequential significance of being positive, negative, catastrophic, posing potential threat, celebratory, providing a solution, or explaining an event. Such an arena for the perception of news must of necessity provide the overall theme(s) through which every news narrative will be encoded and decoded. It is contended that news reports or news stories provide interpretive frames through which we understand or explain events that happen around us. Basically, these frames are nothing more than the images through which phenomena are situated. News professionals organize their stories around basic cultural products or images. From the social constructivist perspective, news story is nothing more than defining events, their causes, and consequences through an organized basic frame embedded in the local culture. The media, and news as a social product, feature prominently as part of our symbolic environment (Altheide, 2000; Altheidi & Schneider, 2013). Our symbolic environment incorporates our traditions and culture. The appropriation of some of our most adored and our most insidious cultural factors as necessary rudiments for news making defines our perception of certain issues and consequently determines the extent of our involvement in the shaping of social reality. In essence, social definitions of events, occurrences, actions, causes and consequences, have become the ever-continuous function of the media as newsmakers. Our definitions and perspective of reality, the way we shape culture and how culture shapes us, our communication formats, how we design and communicate policy issues, and how we stimulate an active reception of activities in our environment have become the most influential responsibilities of media (Altheide, 2000; Crane, 1992; Ferrel & Sanders, 1995; Glaser, 1999; Gerber & Gross, 1976). The factual conglomeration of events collected out of the local cultural arena and their subsequent presentation as news contents of meaningful substance acts as the bridge that connects members of the local environment to news stories and the media houses. News as a product of social construction then becomes a presentation of the way experiences are “framed and thematized as a feature of daily discourse” (Altheide, 2000, p. 288). Media influence individuals through the production of texts. How a text is constructed, its embodiment, and the perspectives of the constructivist as an important agent of social change have become significant fields of inquiry in the attempt to understand why media and news texts wield so much influence on individuals and society. Media research on how individuals receive messages and the consequential effect on their social lives is a field that has also engaged culture and social change research advocates as they try to disentangle the complex relationships between message organizations, construction, and their delivery and reception (McQuail, 2005). Arjrouch (1998) propounds another realm of theoretical positioning that ascribes the social construction of news to the personal perspective of the journalist. According to Ajrouch, in constructing news for public consumption media professionals also dwell on their personal perspectives and experiences. For journalists, personalization becomes important in deciding what event or social occurrence is newsworthy. Through ethnographic and narrative techniques for the research inquiry, Ajrouch focused on how personal experiences and narratives of journalist and their editors influenced the determination of news. The study was premised on the understanding that news is nothing but a social construction. Despite the fact that media houses and news professionals dwell a lot on the production of news as a phenomenon that must be based on credibility and an adherence to objectivity, the “study uncovers various instances where personal experiences directly influence the definition of news and the subsequent reporting of news” (p. 349). The inclusion of personalization as a social construction element in news construction adds to the human reaction factor that is centered on emotional issues. The journalist aims to elicit some response from the audience and that response is in the form of human reaction largely fixated on emotion. By subjecting the construction of news to this concept of personalization, journalists link their own human element in constructing news as a social reality to the human element of the decoder- the audience. This position challenges the assumption of news stories as an equation of facts devoid of personal experiences and emotions. Personal attitudes, experiences and emotions go into the selection of what particular news is of ‘value’ and what is not. This alone puts news construction in the context of human relationships- an important factor of social constructivist perspective.

### **3.0 Media and the concept of framing**

The diverse effects of news media on public opinion have been extensively documented in the literature (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Mcombs & Shaw, 1972). However, the consequential or causal effect of the news media on intended audiences or policies is highly determined by the media’s ability to present the stories in a style that adequately informs, and thus strongly influences their intended audience to change a behavior, engage a certain policy in a debate, and adopt an issue for social change. In performing this function, the media have been noted to consciously or unconsciously enact a pattern of reportage that involve active selection of some issues and making them more salient. This concept of selection and salience is known as framing.

Framing analysis as has, over the years, emerged as a theoretical tool in facilitating the understanding of how newspapers represent news stories on the dissemination and adoption of public policies. This theoretical

position becomes very important for two reasons. Framing analysis 1) has the capability to define issues at stake for the reported phenomenon, and 2) makes clear that the identification of the particular patterns of the representations within the informative narratives can potentially influence the way the phenomena are perceived by a large number of audience/readers (D'Angelo, 2018; Noake & Johnston, 2005; Valeda, 2002).

Framing as an analytical tool was introduced by Goffmann (1974). Goffman investigated how individuals in the society structure and make sense of their everyday experiences. His research led him to conclude that an individual's experience and the consequential understanding of that lived experience produces a meaningful understanding only within the guidance of the socio-cultural norms. In other words, the dominant interpretation of a lived experience is largely imposed on the phenomenon by the norms of the society. However, he also indicated that multiple realities may exist within the dominant interpretation model and within any pre-defined situation. He asserts that, though social norms may create pre-defined frames of interpretations, individuals rely on their "schemata of interpretation" (p. 21) to manage and negotiate their lived experiences and can do so in a manner that may differ from the collective consciousness. Events that happen may lead to different individual experiences which will, in turn, create multiple realities. However, the multiple realities created out of the primary framework of the individual "schemata of interpretation" still occur within the dominant socio-cultural frame. In this sense, because multiple realities are created, the meaning of an event may differ from one individual to the other in a fluid and multi-dimensional pattern. The media as part of the social structure also present their news stories within the dominant interpretation social norms. However, while the individual may negotiate the understanding of reality away from the established social framework, research has shown that the media, due to several constraints such as time and resources, tend to present their stories within the dominant social norms or established framework (Tuchman, 1978). According to Gitlin (1980), the media operate to maintain the status quo. This, therefore, leads them to a report on issues based on a manner that actively inculcates in the public a certain mindset about socio-cultural and economic relationships. This way of presenting new stories to individuals socializes them to understand news stories in particular patterns that seem predictable, reasonable and logical. The media will process and produce news stories or social issues within the existing dominant frame, and all issues, events, and stories that lack or fail to embody in their content any characteristics of the pre-defined frame of dominant interpretations will be marginalized (Borah, 2011; D'Angelo, 2018; de Vreese, 2012; McLeod & Detenber, 1999; Valeda, 2002). Gitlin (1980) further elaborated on this concept of frame by observing that "Frames are principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (p. 6). This systematic institutionalization of meaning making based on the selection of dominant and established norms and frameworks of social significance by the media has led to the notion of media frame by scholars of framing analysis. Gitlin (1980) further defines media frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p. 7). To this end, frames reflect a regular mode of presentation of news events that upholds a dominant cultural matrix within which news media professionals present their stories (Bird & Dardenne, 1997; Norris, 1995).

Framing, therefore, mediates how issues are constructed in news stories. Political communication has used frames as the method of communicating how much and in what manner mass media send out information for audience consumption (Rhee, 1997). Dearing and Rogers (1996) define "framing as the subtle selection of certain aspects of an issue by the media to make them more important and emphasize a particular cause of some problems" (p. 64). Framing is a construction of social reality by the mass media. According to Entman (1993), whose definition of the concept has been cited in much media research, framing provides audience with a scheme to interpret news events. In a more detailed exposition of what a frame is, he states, "to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in communication text, in such way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and /or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). Pickle et al. (2002), following Entman's definition assert that the contents of news stories latently include implied questions for which frames provide answers. Frames provide answers to the implied questions by performing four functions: 1. they define and diagnose a problem; 2. they identify a source or cause; 3. they provide a judgment or evaluate the causal agents and their effects; and 4. they offer or justify what kind of solution should be provided for the problem. Framing determines how news is constructed and what its objectives are. Frames become criteria for selecting news to the extent that the issue that is being framed should be timely, relevant, perceived as being in the public interest, and meets other important news reporting criteria. According to Fiske (1987), frames locate within their body the idea of preferred meaning. The intended purpose of a frame is to control social meaning within the broader ambit of narratives of the dominant culture. In this sense, frames become "a way of organizing text narratives whereby particular dimensions of a phenomenon are highlighted while obscuring or deleting others to emphasize a specific storyline, a certain meaning, or range of meanings" (Valeda, 2002, p. 49) Accordingly, the mass media actively define the frames of reference through which audiences engage of public issues (Tuchman, 1978). The assumption is that the manner of framing the

news has a significant influence on how people come to understand social, cultural and political realities and such socio-cultural and political realities are “a version of the reality built from personal experience, interaction with peers, and interpreted selections from the mass media” (Neumann et al, 1992, p. 120). Audiences’ understanding of news stories largely depend on their social knowledge. This interpretation posits framing as a concept that is grounded in a social constructivist model. This model presents two fronts to the constructivist approach to framing. The first model according to Scheufele (1999), is “by framing images of reality... in a predictable and patterned way” (see also McQuail, 1994, p. 331); that is, the mass media exert considerable effects on audiences through the construction of social reality. Second, the interaction between the mass media and audiences ensures that public opinion has significant impact on journalist and their presentation of news. Mass media news output that defines media discourse is affected by public opinion processes through which journalists “develop and crystallize meaning in public discourse” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 2). Scheufele’s (1999) study reviewed the literature on framing effects, and found support for earlier findings that two significant concepts of framing that emerge for the presentation and comprehension of news are media frames and individual frames.

### **3.1 Media Frame**

The way the mass media frames a news story largely determines how people come to understand the story. Several definitions exist in the literature on the concept of media frame. Tuchman (1978) conceptualized media frame as news frame and indicated that “the news frame organizes everyday reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality... [and an] essential feature of news” (p. 193). People discern issues and events in the news because they have been framed by the media as recognizable concepts that make sense to readers. For Gamson and Modigliani (1989), media frames are “a central organizing idea or story line that provides the meaning to an unfolding strip of events... the frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue” (p.143). Gitlin (1980) indicates that frames are mechanisms through which journalists or the mass media identify and classify news and “package it for efficient relay to audiences” (p.7). In other words, the media use frames as constructs to determine how information can become relevant to the audience. However, the packaging may also be influenced by several socio-cultural and organization structures (Scheufele, 1999: 2000; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). In all these diverse ways through which framing as a concept is captured, the ultimate result is that framing affects the way media (re)present events and issues and as well as how readers/viewers come to make sense of them.

### **3.2 News framing as cultural appropriation**

The primary base through which journalists construct knowledge and package information for their audiences, is through culture. According to Van Gorp (2007), “culture refers to an organized set of beliefs, codes, myths, stereotypes, values, norms, frames, and so forth that are shared in the collective memory of a group or society” (p. 62). The appropriation of culture provides the context through which the production and interpretation of news becomes meaningful to both the journalist and the audience (Hall, 1997; Van Gorp, 2007). Goffman (1974) clearly indicates a linkage between culture and frame when he states, “Frames are central part of culture and are institutionalized in several ways” (p.63). The relevance of the notion of culture as the vehicle for news production, interpretation and comprehension rests on the concept that news frames are embedded in a repertoire of cultural images and that a rendition of these frames in such cultural forms provides the intersecting points for news production and consumption. The use of such cultural images as frames of reference also hinges on the idea that news making and production assume that these cultural images are also loaded with latent structures of meaning that are comprehensible for journalists and audiences. Consequently, when journalists construct their narratives from these perspectives, they do so with the idea that audiences also hold similar frames of reference that facilitate news interpretation (Mcquail, 2005; Tuchman 1978; Tucker, 1998; Van Gorp, 2007). One effect of the regular use of frames as products of the culture is that during their appropriation in the process of news construction and interpretation, they tend to attain normative and natural disposition. In other words, as a phenomenon that is deeply seeded in culture, frames may seem so normal that journalists and audiences sometimes fail to realize or acknowledge their impact in the news production or interpretation processes. The media employ frames as devices for the production of news texts packaged in cultural perspectives, and by that process reduce complex and dynamic events to a level that makes them real, sometimes factual and comprehensible. The media, therefore, through the appropriation of particular frames of reference, indicate how the communicative event should be interpreted. There is an interpretive advocacy on the part of the media from this angle: they want the audience to define and interpret message within their (media) frame of reference in order to arrive at a preferred meaning (van Dijk, 1993). This line of news construction means that media personnel invoke particular range of frames for their stories so that audiences will construct their interpretations of the communicative event within the range of alternative frames provided by the media (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Reese, 2001; Potter, 1996). This constructivist approach for news making is further supported by Van Gorp

(2007) who, in reference to Scheufele (1999) states,

“...the constructionist approach suggests that in the phase of frame building... media makers not only make use of frames but frames also influence the schema of the journalist when they have to represent an issue or an occurrence as a newsworthy event. There is an interaction between the journalist’s (un)conscious selection of a frame- out of the cultural stock of frames- as the result of the individual belief system and the influence of additional factors inside and outside the media organization.” (p. 67)

The thesis is that frames are part of culture, and as such they get embedded in media content. However, frames are in abundance and even though journalists employ a particular range of frames to advocate a preferred interpretation, audiences can invoke alternative frames within the cultural stock of frames to project an alternative/oppositional interpretation of the news story or event.

#### **4.0 News framing and ideology**

Media framing of events as well as the production of news may involve ideological, political and economic factors. The media may sometimes frame events in a manner and design that indicate a confirmation, identification, or reinforcement of a particular ideology. This is normally the case if the media has to rely on institutional and organizational sources of information for their news production since such sources, because of the power they sometimes wield, may have their own agenda of pursuing a line that tilts towards an imposition of their authority on other members of the society (Fishman, 1980; Spencer & Tircher, 1994; Turner, 1982). Again, if the media are under the control of the state apparatus and for that reason rely heavily on politicians and public officials for sources of information, the media definition of such referent communicative events will tend to favor a preferred line of interpretation that imperatively reinforces the authority of those in power. The adoption of persistent cultural framing pattern based on reliance on institutional and official sources of information will, in the end, evoke a unique ideological positioning for the media to which news making process must conform, and through which audience interpretation and understanding of news stories must seek their relevance. However, the media may not even be aware of this point of ideological matrix through which they are framing events. This point is echoed by Hall (1982),

Just as the myth-teller may be unaware of the basic elements out of which his particular version of the story is generated, so broadcasters may not be aware of the fact that the frameworks and classifications they were drawing on reproduced the ideological inventories of their society... statements may be unconsciously drawing on the ideological frameworks and classifying schemes of a society and reproducing them- so that they appear ideologically ‘grammatical’- without those making them being aware of doing so. (p.72).

In other words, as the media frame news through certain sustained patterns within the collective culture of the society, they unconsciously project and sustain certain ideologies above others towards preferred modes of news construction with its consequential preferred mode of interpretation.

#### **4.1 Ideology**

Several writers studying the discourse on ideology agree that the meaning of the concept has become contestable (Akhavan-Majid & Ramprasad, 2000; Bennet, 2003; Richardson, 2005). Bennet (1982) says that, “... the precise way in which the concept of ideology is interpreted and handled [is]-a matter on which Marxists have been by no means united” (p. 49). However, this paper is more interested in the reified position of the concept of ideology as a ground upon which some media systems operate and reproduce their ideas and messages. Again, I am also interested in ideology and framing as concepts that have relational properties; one can determine and may (re)produce the other. More importantly, because of their (un)conscious appropriation by the media, both concepts have the capacity to create “definite forms of social consciousness” (Bennet, 2003, p. 47) – a phenomenon deciphered from Marx’s use of the concept of ideology. From the foregoing, I dwell on the conceptual definition of ideology as defined by Bennet (2003) from a Marxist perspective. Bennet indicates that the concept of ideology implies two things. First, he perceives ideology as concept that has to do with the “social determination of signifying systems,” and second, as a “distortion” or “misrecognition” (p. 47). The first is drawn upon Marx’s conception that ideology develops through the process of social interaction and that, at any given time, what a system signifies is defined within a given period and time according to the purview of a given social group. According to Marx, this group is normally the elite and the powerful that control the mental processes of production. Through this process they are able to produce, direct, and shape knowledge and represent ideas as consequential, natural, inevitable, and rational (Jones, 2001; Richardson, 2007). On the second notion of ideology as “distortion” (p. 47). Bennet (2003) provides a simple definition, “the meaning is present in the common-sense usage of the term which is usually applied to statements which are felt to be a motivated distortion of the truth” (p.48). He also notes that the notion of distortion does not of necessity imply falsehood, dishonesty or any act of deception. Rather the dominant relationship has had a deep-seated effect on the consciousness of individuals to the extent that they are unable to interrogate the “categories” and “assumptions”

of the existing social relationships because they have become intensely unconscious of it. Bennet pulls these two phases of the Marxist perspective on ideology together with a more elaborative tone:

Ideology, in this most distinctive sense, is thus concerned with the transmission of systems of signification across class lines. This is conceived not as an abstract process but as being effected, in a concrete way, via ‘the means of mental production’ controlled by the economically dominant class. The consciousness of those subjected to this relay of ideologies is thus distorted not abstractly but, in a way, conducive to the perpetuation of existing relationships of class domination (p. 48-49).

From the above perspective, Bennet provides three areas under which ideology becomes important to the media. The first area is in the form of social control revealed through individual and corporate ownership over media houses. Through these forms of media ownership, the operations of the media organizations are compromised to the benefit of the ruling class which, in the end, helps to enhance and sustain their hold as the dominant group. Second, the systems of signification embedded in the cultural images and messages communicated by the media are made to function as social reality. The media, then, as products of the dominant social relationships, relay messages and by that performance, define reality by representing the ideas of the dominant group as factual, rational and inevitable representation of social reality. Even though this act of system signification can result in distortion, it is lost upon the media because they are unconscious of the “conditions of their existence” (p. 49). Yet, on a formal level of analysis, any ideological representation of the messages will be solely attributed to them. In this sense the media becomes an ideological entity. Third, in places where the media is state-owned, they actively engage in promoting the ideas of the ruling elite as knowledge that is good for the health of the country and the citizenry. In this case, the production and dissemination of information is historicized by the media to the point of imputing legitimacy to the dominant social relationships. The media in the process demonstrates that all aspects of social formation politics, economics, health, and education- can only be construed as meaningful phenomena in relations to one another. The other theorist, whose definition of ideology becomes imperatively relevant to this paper, is Stuart Hall, (1986). He defines ideology as, “the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation- which different classes and social groups deploy to make sense, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works” (p. 29). The above definition shows that ideology only makes sense from the perspective of social practice.

The concept of “mental frameworks” constitutes ideas and social practices shared by the majority of the people in any society. The social practices in a given environment are the stock of knowledge of that society- the repertoire for social signification. Ideology just reproduces the stock of knowledge in that society. In a sense, because ideology is part of the social formation, it provides us with various sets of representations that constitute the framework through which individuals and the society interpret events. This perspective is also shared by Becker (1984) who provides a definition of the concept from the “framework” perspective. He states, “Ideology is an integrated set of frames of reference through which each of us sees the world and to which all of us adjust our actions” (p.69). Ideology in this capacity is conceived in relation to accreted social practices which contain the “frames of references” for our perception of the world. Hall (1982) further indicates “ideologies are structures...sets of rules which determine an organization and the functioning of images and concepts...ideology is a system of coding reality and not a set of determined coded message...” (p. 71). Ideology, then, enables us to identify and make meaning of images and concepts that function in a text. Through their ideological imprint news stories achieve social reality because they are made to operate within a certain ideological discourse. We can identify the underlying structure of the news text through its ideological properties. Understanding a news story from the point of view of ideology means a news story consists of “elements, premises and assumptions” embedded in the cumulative histories, diverse discourses, and “social formations” that together form a mass pool of culture from which the media draw on to construct their stories (Hall, 1982, p. 71). Croteau and Hoynes (2003) state: “an ideology is basically a system of means that helps to explain the world, and that makes value judgment about that world.

Ideology is related to worldview, belief system and values... it refers not only to the beliefs held about the world but also the basic ways in which the world is defined” (p.160). Ideology helps us to define events and understand them as cultural and social issues. For example, when we approach a media text our inclination for understanding the contents of that text is not just about the text itself but more importantly about all the broader events that lay outside it, all the cultural issues and images from which the text draws its production and interpretation and its ideological construction and orientation. Therefore, media text can be rationalized and understood in ideological contexts as communicative events that allow certain ideas to be communicated and others neglected.

#### **4.2 Ideology and news framing**

The literature news framing identifies three types of ideology that exert influence on how the media frame news stories. These include the dominant ideology, elite ideology, and journalistic ideology (Akhavan-Mahid &

Ramaprasad, 2000; Becker, 1984; Murdock and Golding, 1977; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). The dominant ideology proclaims the ideas shared by the majority of the people in a society. Accordingly, members of the society, through various historicized discourses and social practices, legitimate some ideas within the society that they affirm as authoritative and credible, especially for communicative purposes. In several situations, what is acceptable are the beliefs, knowledge and opinions shared by majority of the people in the society and views that are inconsistent or incongruous with the adopted beliefs are either neglected or highly marginalized. The production and interpretation of any communicative event is implicitly defined by this mode of ideological portrait. For example, the dominant ideology governing news production and interpretation in Ghana is through the discourse and perspective of the public officials. Through this process of framing news journalists in Ghana project their belief in official sources and rhetoric as the sacrosanct version of a news story. There is a reproduction of official discourses as the objective truth even though, inherently, the sources harbour ideological imprints.

This type of ideology, in form and structure, is yoked to the next -elite ideology.

The elite ideology refers to the projection of the ideas of the ruling class, government, public officials and highly educated professional as the most authentic, authoritative and trustworthy ideas. Elite ideology and dominant ideology share common features except that the elite ideology is sometimes more forceful and powerful, and may generally prevail against the dominant ideology. For example, when it comes to policy issues and political choices, the ideas of the elite mostly prevail against the dominant ideology and, in all, may determine the next the journalistic ideology.

Journalistic ideology includes the media routines that have become the established culture of news production in a society (Akhavan-Mahid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Murdock & Golding, 1977; Becker 1984). The ideas present in this type of ideology show that when it comes to news stories, particular ways of news sourcing, news priming, and headline presentation must always take precedent over others. For example, the journalistic ideology that prevails in Africa mostly emphasizes government and official discourse in news production. This mode of representation reinforces elite ideology as a pervasive system in several African societies (Asante, 1996; Obeng Quaidoo, 1988). It asserts that government and official sources of information have a high degree of authenticity and credibility. Through such heavy reliance on official sources, the media create their own journalistic ideology and impose it on the audience. Again, reliance on official sources leads to an articulation of the ideas of the ruling elites, and legitimates the dominant ideology. In several societies where the media have become ‘the dominant means for social signification’ (Hall, 1988) an enactment of journalistic ideology presupposes an enactment and a reinforcement of elite ideology.

## 5.0 Conclusion

As indicated in the literature review, the media may sometimes frame issues to confirm, identify, or reinforce particular ideology. It also further indicates that news stories achieve their social relevance because they are made to function within a certain ideological discourse (Becker, 1984; Hall, 1980; Richardson, 2005). When the media pursue this pattern of news making, they consciously or unconsciously enact a journalistic ideology that reinforces elite voices on public discourse. Journalistic ideology, therefore, implies the regular and sometimes persistent evocation of certain media routines and established culture of news production in a society (Akhavan-Mahid & Ramaprasad, 2000; Murdock and Golding, 1977; Becker 1984). This also means that the routines and established culture become the legitimated mode of interpreting and understanding communicative events by the public.

For example, Ofori-Birikorang (2009) study on how four major newspapers in Ghana framed the National Health Insurance Scheme policy indicated a journalistic ideology that routinised official discourses as the premium, credible and authentic sources. In that investigation, the enactment of journalistic ideology was very dominant. In line with the dominant representation of news events in Ghana, the data analyses of the framing and the interviews conducted showed that *corruption* frame became marginalized because journalists’ heavy reliance on official discourses led to a procurement of frames that would be devoid of issues on corruption since the politicians, who would have been the tags in the frame of corruption, had loud and pervasive rhetorical presence in the construction of narratives. The news stories and the interviews established that news sourcing and news priming as routine media processes were presented on the authoritative voices of government officials. This systematic invocation of the official voices and position on public discourse also reinforces not only the journalistic ideology but also the elite ideology. Whilst most of the NHIS news stories echoed elite voices in headlines and leads, all the interviews conducted with media professionals affirmed this culture of news making by indicating the indispensability and inevitability of official rhetoric as the most credible and legitimate source for major news stories. In the NHIS narratives the media showed a higher level of disengagement from politics. Even when they seem to be devoting enough columns to core issues of the health policy, the narratives nevertheless articulated the ideas of public officials and the ruling elites, and not the narratives of the ordinary people. The rationale was that most of the stories on the business, core NHIS, or community and development



issues were sourced from government officials or politicians. None of the stories articulated the perspective of individuals other than elite personalities. The culture of creating credibility and legitimacy for news by framing events through a closer identification and connection with the rhetoric of officialdom is a reporting culture of the Ghanaian media and therefore, their journalistic ideology. Through this ideological culture of news production and interpretations that articulate the discourse and perspective of public officials, the media do not only impose their own journalist ideology on the individuals and audiences but also confirm, reinforce, and entrench the ideas of the elite as the most dominant mode of negotiating news stories.

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