Power in Media Frames: Thinking about Strategic Framing and Media System Dependency and the Events of September 11, 2001

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Introduction

The tragic events occurring on September 11th, 2001 in the United States and the subsequent military campaigns prosecuted by the United States military are important historical points of departure for looking at the relationships of power inherent in media production and consumption. These events reveal the interdependencies between layers of the social strata – between the macro level of the nation-state and society, the meso-level media organizational actors, and the micro-level of the individual citizen. These interdependences shaped not only our collective interpretation of the events as they unfolded, but also the collective reaction and subsequent consent given to our representative government to respond to the events.

This paper focuses on the relationship between the capacity of media to order reality, the way in which the media delivers information, and the media environment that the production of information is embedded within. More specifically, this paper seeks to link notions of the relationships of power in media ecology as exemplified by Ball-Rokeach's Media System Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach, 1998) with the emerging set of ideas and theories related to how media messages are organized and delivered through *frames*. From this relationship, we can conceptualize how relationships between levels of the social strata are continually reinforced and social systems are maintained or *manipulated* through the use of "strategic" framing (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). The sudden and unexpected explosion of foreign policy onto the public agenda provides an opportunity to work through, in this paper, the ways in which Zhongdang Pan & Gerald Kosicki's theory of "Strategic Framing" and Sandra J. Ball-Rokeach's theory of Media System Dependency function together to describe the dynamics of media power.

The events of September 11th, 2001 provide us with a window into the mechanisms of interdependency and power relations embedded in media systems. From an abstract starting point, an external input or "extreme event" shakes up our national society's sense of security and "place" in the world and promotes a sense of widespread "ambiguity" - immediately forcing an assessment of the structure of relations embedded in our society – from the individual level to the nation-state. Or so one might think. While the events of September 11th may not have sparked a nation-wide reckoning of how our democratic society is functioning, it has made our relationship with certain channels of information distribution more evident. What *is* apparent is that this type of event lays bare the structural dependencies embedded in our level of information about the world – the hierarchy, if you will, of the how we get to know what we know. Relationships of power are contained within this hierarchy, and it is here this paper intends to intervene.

The link between insights from Media System Dependency theory and theories of framing illustrate the sort of consequences that can result from the structural relationships that govern the production of media messages. Newer ideas about the nature of framing and its relationship to political action and advocacy (Pan & Kosicki, 2001) position framing as a way to outline not only issues, but social groups that can advocate political policies. These "discursive communities" are political actors themselves that use frames as the "guideposts" to influence and implement policy. They make up the critical collectives of the public sphere that navigate and create the way our national community is "imagined" (see Anderson, 1991). In this sense, one could situate discursive communities as the articulation of social solidarities that share certain points of advocacy (or frames). These *compete* strategically in public debate to determine what our greater

society, or social imaginary, should look like (Calhoun, 2002). It is important, then, to consider what sort of guiding principles or ideas shape these communities – and how they acquire them in the first place.

This paper offers the following basic assumptions to work from: democratic societies are dependent upon the process of public deliberation (Pan & Kosicki, 2001) and citizens participate in the governance of society (Habermas, 1989). Public deliberation is dependent upon positions and ideas that make up competitive perspectives (*something to deliberate about*). These perspectives can be conceived of as frames that are "contested in a public arena" (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). These frames, however, are also a form of media effect – a product of the way in which information is portrayed through media channels. At the point where frames are themselves dependent on the range of media messages they are based upon, they are subject to the relationships of dependency and power embedded in media systems. If frames structure and order the way we perceive the world (Entman, 1993; Reese, 2001), then what they can achieve in terms of public deliberation and also the way in which they are formed are equally important.

This model raises a number of questions. First, what is the relationship between frames and the media systems that produce them? What kind of strategic action is being played out through frames, and how are they being constructed? Second, how dependent is the media (in this paper, primarily the news media) on higher strata of the social hierarchy (such as the nation-state government or multi-national capitalist imperatives)? Finally, what happens when public deliberation (the requirement of democracy) is constrained by the limitation of perspectives articulated in media-presented frames? While the idea of *strategic* framing may re-invest the notion of frames with some form of

agency, it cannot escape the ecological conditions of privilege that some perspectives

enjoy as opposed to alternatives in any sort of "knowledge production contest" (Ball-

Rokeach, 1998, p. 24).

Framing: An Ongoing Process of Conceptualization

Media consumers received news about the events of September 11th, 2001 and its

aftermath through specific media channels – which were predominately through

television news media. *Framing* theories of media effects argue that this information was

organized in such a way as to "frame" the events for our understanding, ordering the

causal logic, ethics, and context of the events to lesson the confusion and ambiguity of

what transpired. Framing theories argue that the way in which we receive information –

indeed, how the story is told, begins to structure how we view what has transpired

(Entman, 1993; Sheufele, 1999; Pan & Kosicki, 2001). While this tradition does imply at

some level the notion that media effects can be measured – it does not necessarily imply

that there are *strong* effects (a deterministic view of media having a strong role in

structuring our reality). Nevertheless, theories of framing follow a tradition emerging in

the 1980s in the field of media effects research that emphasize the social construction of

knowledge and/or reality at some level within journalistic work and media content.

Sheufele's work (1999) attempts to provide some categorical and definitive

discipline to our understanding of framing. Framing alternatively can be described as

media framing and *individual* framing. The former is the "central organizing idea or story

line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events…" (Gamson & Modigliani,

1987). Media framing is "to select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them

more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or recommendation" (Entman, 1993).

The latter (individual frames) are "mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals processing of information" (Entman, 1993). The dividing line that Sheufele draws between media and individual frames, however, are probably not as mutually exclusive as he proposes. For example, Shuefele argues that "whereas global political views are a result of certain personal characteristics of individuals and have a rather limited influence on the perception and interpretation of political problems (see Kinder, 1983), short term, issue-related frames of reference can have significant impact on perceiving, organizing, and interpreting incoming information and on draw inferences form that information " (Sheufele, 1999 p. 107). The notion that global political views can be separated analytically from "short-term, issue-related frames" seems highly unlikely, given that the need to make order out of ambiguity could be applied equally to conditions of global insecurity as they do to more immediate, "short-term" frames.

Pan & Kosicki's re-deployment of framing as a concept investigates how framing can be used in deliberation and advocacy. Fundamental to their notion of framing is that it is a "discursive process" that makes up the "symbolic resources in collective sense-making" (Gamson, 1996). Pan & Kosicki's questions focus on how frames are constructed in public deliberation, and how they are used (contested) in the "public arena" – implying that questions of how frames are constructed and how they are used are equally important. Sheufele, recognizing a similar imperative in his survey of the use of framing in research, proposes a model for how framing *effects* and *processes* are

interrelated (essentially, a way for how they are made and used) – a model for the relationship between the production and consumption of media and individual frames.

Instead of identifying specific types of media frames or individual frames, Pan & Kosicki offer that it is a much more general strategy of "sense-making" that is drawn from the "cultural repertoire of symbolic resources". Frames and framing "resonate with a broader ideological perspective" (Snow & Benford, 1988; 1992). Frames are, in a sense, organized beliefs and strategies that orient individuals to certain perspectives. To frame, as an action, is to "participate in public debate strategically." It is also to "contest" the frames of others (Pan & Kosicki, 2001).

Pan & Kosicki link framing and frames to those who participate in public debate, be they politicians, activists, or those producing certain media messages. Their "framing efforts" produce and reproduce themselves as a "discursive community." These discursive communities are a "historical moment of a social aggregate, which functions as a basis for collective action"(Wuthnow, 1989). More succinctly, "framing not only frames an issue, but also frames social groups." Frames indicate the groups they emerge from. "Through framing, cultural categories are reproduced and enriched and the sociological boundaries of these physical units are reinforced or remapped" (Pan & Kosicki, 2001).

Frames under this sort of broad category is a strategic action that provides its own set of descriptions that describe world-views, establish what is legitimate discourse, and draw from the symbolic repertoire available in media space. More importantly – they define the "boundary of discourse" for the means of "community building." Framing "interprets political activities and statements to "construct the factuality of the political

world" (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). The boundaries of framing are in essence a form of redefinition/re-interpretation for actions, policies, and actors – that establish the borders for what is discussed and considered in deliberation. Boundary-making also implies a normative/evaluative dimension as well. Boundaries begin to delineate what types of discourses eventually get produced as media content.

If we accept a definition of "framing" as a "strategic action" – how can it be helpful for looking at the effects of framing in a media environment if framing exists at the individual, group, and message level? Are all frames the product of a conscious, strategic action? Framing as an integral part of the democratic process of public deliberation is not something that can be assumed to be capable by all potential deliberative actors. To that end Pan & Kosicki add a qualification to their notion of agentic framing – by noting that it is dependent on the ability of a discursive community to promote such a frame.

Pan & Kosicki call this "frame sponsorship." The *potency* of frame (one can assume this means its ubiquity or salience in the public sphere and its impact on policy) is dependent on 1) access to and control of material resources, 2) strategic alliances, and 3) the stock of knowledge and skills in frame sponsorship (Gamson, 1988). Framing is related to the materials, skills, and social position from which it is articulated and promoted. Given the ingredients for participation in strategic framing, they are attempting to claim that the sphere of political activity is expanding due to advances in information and communication technologies and the emergence of alternative media outlets for frame promotion. These elements are enlarging the pool of actors with the resources and skills to promote and organize their "frame" in a public, deliberative space.

The space for frame sponsorship is not necessarily equitable, but rather is a space where some actors and communities of interest are equipped with a more robust "web of subsidies" that allow them to "privilege the dissemination and packaging of information to their advantage." "Subsidies," rather, reflect a political economy of "information and influence." This involves the strategic manipulation of events and outlets for the promotion of a frame that is cost-effective to the media sources (journalists, news agencies, etc) – thus making them more likely to "cover" such an event. Pan & Kosicki call frame promoters "issue entrepreneurs". These entities through skills, resources, and connections, make their positions more favorable to *both* journalists and policy-makers by mobilizing their attributes by making their positions essentially more cost-beneficial.

This is not to say that material resources alone are sufficient to the success of issue entrepreneurs. There are other standards by which a framing strategy can be successful. Snow and Benford offer three: empirical credibility, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity (1988). These conditions appeal to the ability of a frame to tap into social and cultural expectations (the symbolic repertoire) prevalent in a society of media consumers. Nevertheless, there is an articulated link between the strategic act of framing, frame construction, frame promotion and the resources and social linkages necessary to guarantee a frames "success" – either in achieving public opinion change or manifesting as some point on the national political agenda.

Linking Framing to Media System Dependency

Thinking about frames as strategic makes an important step toward situating the process of framing within the context of socio-political action – by making framing an

integral part of the way in which both individuals and collectives organize information for the promotion of interest and the reduction of ambiguity in the relentless tide of information. Framing provides a conceptual bridge between theorizing cognitive notions of individual relationship with information and with the production of information.

Making the hierarchy visible is the link between any sort of concept of framing as a means of opinion cultivation and a theory of how media systems constrain and enable the process of framing itself. It is here that Media System Dependency (MSD) theory proves useful as way to theorize the environmental factors at work in the production and consumption of frames. While cultivation alerts us to the notion that long-term exposure to certain messages may alter or change the way we individually frame events and ideas – what sort of structural factors go into the ways in which these messages are framed themselves?

Pan & Kosicki's arguments about framing are in some sense a way of recuperating the notion of framing from any sort of perspective that is overly deterministic – a result of an over-arching structural situation of cultural hegemony. Instead, framing as strategic action implies that the means to frame are not necessarily out of the control of those who could promote alternative frames in the media, and represent non-popular frames in a discursive community. Again, the key to strategic framing is *agency*. The frames that govern our interpretive capacities for the generation of meaning are not fixed, but are contested by collectives that congregate to promote or "subsidize" a specific frame perspective. If frames do operate at a level where they "resonate" with cultural and symbolic characteristics of society – perhaps at some point the effect of framing is also to alter these norms in addition to serving as an appeal to

them. If we grant that this is possible – and the conditions for frame promotion admitted by Pan & Kosicki – then we must admit that our capacity to construct and make collective sense of reality is conditioned by those in positions of power (both materially and ideologically). While there may be recourse to domination (the capacity to *be strategic*), it is mitigated by very material conditions that allow such action.

Because the strategic involves competitive action, and thus some frames must "win out" over others – there is power embedded in the way in which frames get subsidized over others. Power, a difficult term to describe concretely, is viewed in this paper as a relational condition that situates actors and analytical "levels" accordingly to their dependence on each other. MSD theory reveals the relevance of the social environment to the relationship between media, higher levels of analysis, and the individual (or micro level). "Power is related to dependence (not just resource allocation)" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

MSD holds that the notion of ambiguity reduction is important in the way in which information systems become central to social life. Much like cognitive notions of frames being a means by which we "stem the information tide," MSD theory maintains links to the trend in media effects research that media discourse contributes to the construction of perceived reality. Ambiguity, however, is related to the inadequacies and alienations endemic to contemporary social life; "…an informational and affective problem largely created by social environments that did not (could not) communicate coherent patterns of social relations with which individuals could define their worlds" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 9). Media systems, in the MSD perspective, hold a special place

in "dealing" with ambiguity. The media system functions as an "information system central to the adaptive conduct of societal and personal life" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 9).

The comprehensive capacity for this perspective to capture the way in which social environments effect different levels of social life are critical for looking at the role that strategic framing may play in a modern democracy – by showing the linkages between actions and constraints operating at higher levels, and their consequences for individual behavior and attitudes. Macro relations, such as the relationship between the national governments and the news media – have consequences for those farther down the chain of dependency on media systems. An observed example of dependency in macro relations is Lance Bennett's notion of "media indexing" – where information about most foreign and military policy is constrained by the news media's "indexing" of their reported information to mostly official government sources (rather than more "objective" or even "critical" sources). This process has become even more predominant as the United States moves to control nearly all aspects of information flow around its international policies, starting with the 1991 Gulf War and now the coverage of the "War on Terror" (Bennett, 1984; 1994). This phenomenon functions as "constraints and activators of both interpersonal and individual media relations" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p.14).

If the public is dependent on sources of media to alleviate or mitigate ambiguity, then individual and interpersonal network relations are subject to the consequences of what power relationships media systems are themselves subject to. This does not, again, mean that individual or interpersonal networks are "dupes" to a deterministic knowledge construction at work in the media. Nevertheless, the cognitive equipment that individuals

select from (like strategic frames) are limited by what sort of information is available to consume. MSD reminds researchers that the "causal" line of reasoning must account for the influence across social hierarchical levels. "Macro MSD relations directly affect the range of texts that the media produce" (p. 22). These consequences can be witnessed in "public opinion… a direct product of the altered dependency between the state and the media." MSD re-orients the media effects perspective to acknowledge that " the more general ecological point was that changes in macro relations had brought changes in individual relations, through changes in interpersonal network dependency relations (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 14).

Why do we need to consider MSD as a theory of power? MSD is "conceived as relations of production that gives rise to text, including relations that bound and influence text reconstruction." (p. 15) The dependencies of media on government sources, or the constraining of media objectivity by economic imperatives create the condition for "structural relations of control over information resources that generate power to create social realities and, in so doing, to negotiate social conflict and social change" (Ball-Rokeach, 1998, p. 29). Extending this logic to the idea of strategic framing – we find that MSD is an abstract articulation of the power that frames or the act of framing may have over the way in which social relations are resolved in public discourse. If the means of constructing frames that can successfully generate a discursive community of support for the frames are limited to key material and relational conditions (resources, skills, and a network of connections) – then the frames of the "powerful" who can successfully deploy a "web of subsidies" for their frames are privileged.

These are the frames that will most likely capture the agenda of public deliberation – and set the boundaries for what is considered in any public "choice" between competitive frames for making sense of our world. This position is not to argue that there is no agency for those unable to field a "web of subsidies". There is still Elihu Katz's position that the more relevant question is "what people do with media discourse." But, what happens when the "game" is "rigged?" What happens when the ability to "collectively sense-make" is controlled (explicitly or implicitly) by the competitive interests capable of manipulating the structural relationships between media and public discourse? What happens when *someone else* "constructs the factuality of the political world" (Pan & Kosicki, 2001)?

Framing and the Events of September 11, 2001: Ideas about Consequences

One of the things we need to consider in linking strategic framing to potential consequences as a result of media representation of 9/11 is the notion of *agency*. Resolving the agency/structure question is a perennially thorny question of perspective (or, where is your standpoint of observation?). If we acknowledge that media play a role in the construction of social knowledge – it is assumed that we should accept some sort of constraint on agency. It may not always be what we do to media discourse (as Katz would say). Where is the media "space" for deliberation beyond an uncritical media spectacle? If we accept the unsettling possibility that the frame for representation of 9/11 was a strategic frame – then we must consider critically the consequences of such a condition.

Considering the consequences in terms of what has been presented in this paper means linking the notion of dependence with effect. First and foremost, we have seen that the immediate, visceral, and unprecedented nature of the terrorist attack highlighted the overwhelming dependence on television for information consumption. A Pew Center study on how people got their information about the events of September 11 indicated that 81% got their information from television media. This is compared to 11% from radio and 3% from the Internet. While this is not altogether surprising – keep in mind the gist of Pan & Kosicki's arguments about agency in public deliberation, which is dependent on alternative forms of media that enable participation.

Did the frames of national televised coverage result in some sort of unique transformation of the public sphere? The events of 9/11 supposedly resulted in a new sense of faith in the institutions of government and a larger sense of national community tolerance – at least according to study. Did "framing" of the way in which Americans are interpreted through a common frame of victimization have an effect on any sense of national belonging? Where does the sense of the "collective we" come from? One study offered that this was more of an activation of *existing* relationships than the building of more durable and lasting sense of national belonging. (Cohen, Ball-Rokeach, Jung & Kim, 2002). In a study of the effects of September 11th on the level of community and civic participation in various communities of the Los Angeles area, the events may have activated existing patterns and levels of participation – rather than spontaneously generating new forms of solidarity. There was an activation of "latent potential" for civic engagement and a "generalization effect" where residents oriented to civic participation in their neighborhoods expanded (or redirected) their activities to a national need. "Put

simply, residents who were embedded in their residential storytelling networks before Sept. 11 are more likely than the newly active to sustain their levels of civic participation after Sept. 11 because they are grounded in a storytelling communication infrastructure fabric (Ball-Rokeach, Kim, & Matei, 2001). As the focus and immediacy of the national media drifts from terrorists attacks – so does the level of civic participation amongst those who were not previously more engaged citizens.

This sort of observation reveals something interesting about the relationship between media and engagement. It highlights the dependency on national media systems, and its relative inability to provoke lasting social capital at the local level. Why is this so? Is it because the national reporting had little local relevance, a lack of deeper connections in an imagined national community? Or was it that the way in which it was reported (indeed, its frame) provided little agency for national articulation of solidarity and participation in the event – other than the practice of citizenship through consumption (Canclini, 2001) such as buying American flag bumper stickers or contributing to "thin" public forums like CNN's *Talk-Back Live*? It may be that the capacity for any sort of communication infrastructure to generate social capital from an event like September 11th may be dependent on the capacity for storytellers to utilize tools like frames in an engaged and informative manner. In other words, they need information other than the packaged and uncritical reporting offered through coverage of the crisis and the emergent, coordinated policy consensus.

"Style of reporting" at the national level thus has important consequences. Similar criticism has been raised about what can happen when national public issues are framed in specific ways The "horse-race" style of political campaign reporting (Hollihan, 2001)

and its narrowing of the space for public consideration of substantive issues in election campaigns could possibility yield insights into the effects of specific framing for foreign affairs events. What happens when reporting of foreign affairs focuses on the "wrangling of policy experts" in a zero-sum or highly competitive frame of international affairs? Does this contribute to any sort of cultivation of world view? Indeed, how can public agency be considered when protest frames are marginalized and media representation highlights almost complete dependency on government response that supposedly represents a legitimate conception of perceived national interest?

Uncritical reporting is itself a type of frame. The homogenized messaging offered during the crises and the ensuing "War on Terror" only highlighted the notion of the Bush administration's policy of "one is either with us or against us." Media system dependency, helpfully elaborated in concepts like media indexing, only reinforces the "one-way" aspect of public deliberation in foreign affairs. Any sort of strategic agency depends on alternatives to both information and means of communication. This is an important distinction with the internal agentic capacity of media consumers and their interpersonal networks – dependency highlights that which they have to work with, not their ability to negotiate meaning internally. The importance of frames lies not just in the stories that are told, but the *stories that are not told*.

Related theories like cultivation (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1994; Shannon & Jones, 1999) and the idea of boundary-making in strategic framing also have specific consequences within the context of media representation of the events of September, 11. Rather than the coaching of a mean-world view, we have witnessed the cultivation of a world-view limited by the views by policy pundits and the theoretical

agenda of specific administration officials. One way to describe this is the almost hegemonic re-assertion of a self-justified "regime of rationality" (Poster, 2001) of neo-realistic/conservative thinking about foreign policy. Strategic framing as a perspective reveals the intersection of political interest and academic theoretical preference in the way the policy was portrayed in the aftermath of September 11. It amounts to a process of world-building by building largely uncontested public credibility for the social imaginary of the Bush Administration. Cold-War frames of the "security dilemma", state-centric analyses are used, while no real vocabulary for understanding how the United States could "go after" *networks* are given. Instead, the role of the media is relegated to conveying the Bush doctrine strategic frame of the war as "good vs. evil," rather than say, one of "law-breakers" against a more cosmopolitan world order.

The strategic frame (or "world-view") offered by the Bush administration through an uncritical media environment provides a limited range of deliberation alternatives. Again, this does not imply that such frames are accepted without question. In a critique of cultural imperialism, Tomlinson argues similarly that world-views do not necessarily get transmitted via media without issue. There needs to be a negotiation with the text. Citing a Katz and Leibes study (1986) on the reception of watching Dallas by other cultures, there exists evidence for this sort of active construction of meaning and interpretation. Just as we "cannot assume that people watching Dallas makes people want to be rich" (Tomlinson, 1991), we cannot assume that watching 9/11 and subsequent government reaction presumes agreement with the policies of the Bush administration, that it represents the best interests for America and its place in the world. In their study Katz and Leibes offer that an "active social process of viewing… demonstrates a high level of

sophistication in the discursive interpretations of ordinary people." This presumes, however, that "ordinary people" have a sufficient interest to possess the knowledge necessary to engage critically with issues of international affairs.

What happens when the general public has little interest in constructing alternative frames, or indeed forming a discursive community in opposition to the media generated frame that is dependent on the voice of the government as principle knowledge authority? A recent Pew Research Center for the People and the Press study reveals that interest is not increasing significantly in the public for international affairs.

> "At best, a slightly larger percentage of the public is expressing general interest in international and national news, but there is no evidence its appetite for international news extends much beyond terrorism and the Middle East. More Americans say they are generally interested in international news; the number who follow overseas developments very closely has grown from 14% to 21% over the past two years. But a solid majority of the public (61%) continues to track international news only when major developments occur, while far fewer (37%) are consistently engaged by international news coverage. By comparison, solid majorities keep up with national and local news (53%, 56% respectively) most of the time, not just when something important happens. (Pew Center, 2002)

There is little perceived appetite for a public debate on the way in which the administration is prosecuting its reaction to the events of September 11. Perhaps this condition encourages totalizing strategic frames that simplify the complexities of the United States' relationship with the rest of the world, its responsibilities, and indeed its culpabilities. There is no question that the complexity of global affairs can be daunting, but an "encouraged withdrawal" of public engagement from global affairs means greater leniency to those who claim political legitimacy in speaking for the public.

'The survey offers powerful evidence that broad interest in international news is most inhibited by

the public's lack of background information in this area. Overall, roughly two-thirds (65%) of those

with moderate or low interest in international news say they sometimes lose interest in these stories

because they lack the background information to keep up." (Pew Center, 2002)

A sense of information deficiency in the wake of crises-provoked global ambiguity only *heightens* dependency to media systems, and their relationship with higher levels of social strata. (i.e. – the government). This makes "world-views" more susceptible to cultivation effects and the manipulation of strategic frames towards the formation and reification of discursive communities that serve the interests of the elite. If the central question of effect is the negotiation is between text and audience – then we need to focus on the constraints of the text before we make definitive statements about the nature of audience agency. The fact that Pan & Kosicki's notion of strategic framing (and the integral corollary concept of "web of subsides") means agency is mitigated by material conditions (*or* dependency on those who have the "resources" to shape public argument).

Conclusion

This essay has been an attempt at charting the relationship between the theoretical notion of strategic framing and the ecological viewpoint of Media System Dependency Theory, as they pertain to the unique context of media representation of the tragic events of September 11, 2001. While the authors of the idea of "strategic framing" claim to recuperate the agency of the audience through participation in public deliberation – their theory's caveats about the ability to promote frames in a competitive media environment reveal structural dependencies that mitigate such externally displayed agency.

The ramifications of this condition, coupled with the unique context of the way in which the public engages in deliberation over issues of foreign affairs serves to magnify the consequences of a "web of subsidies." A mass-audience prone to deferring authority over a specific strategic frame is more likely to be dependent on the structural inequalities of the media system. This is a key example for how social knowledge is constructed and gains its own currency of legitimacy in an uncontested media environment.

To be fair, some of the arguments in this essay have bordered on polemical – yet it is important to note that the observation that this essay may read as polemical is indicative of the level of legitimacy we grant to the way strategic international relations frames are almost always uncontested. Further research is necessary, given the context of the events of September 11, on not only what sort of media gain importance in situations of national crisis, but just who are the actors engaging in competition of strategic frames (if indeed, there are any). Furthermore, an investigation into the way in which mass media functions as a storyteller of national solidarity may be important for looking at ways in which national media may stimulate or stifle the national storytelling process and civic participation in general. Finally, further investigation of the ways in which modes of public participation in political deliberation should continue – if Pan & Kosicki's arguments about the expanded sphere of deliberation through certain technologies are to hold. Existing research on the contribution of technology to an expanded public sphere have yielded somewhat mixed conclusions (Dutton, 1999). Nevertheless, the reconceptualization of the public sphere as a space for the mobilization of materially-determined strategic frames is an important step towards a more critical understanding of media and democracy and of avenues for building a more participatory form of civic life.

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