

# A Study Media Coverage of College Crisis under Framing Theory

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**Abstract:** Framing as an academic concept to examine human cognition and communication behavior was first seen in anthropologist Bateson's paper "A Theory of Play and Fantasy" published in 1955. The most direct manifestation vehicle of framing effect in news communication is framing theory, which means that a certain framing effect is achieved by selecting and emphasizing a certain content. However, the media coverage of the college crises has been ignoring the framing theory and changes in the information technology era. The article will analyze the current research on media coverage of college crises based on the framing theory in the information era and try to innovate and apply it to this. The information environment has made the information that has been diluted and hidden under the traditional news media framework come to the surface, and more and more information has been focused under the spotlight to be examined by the public. Such a journalistic framework has undoubtedly had a crucial impact on the public crises that arise in today's universities.

## 1 Introduction

With the development of the times, public crises are getting more and more attention and concern from academia as well as the public, and the study of crisis events in colleges and universities has gradually become a hot spot. As a special group environment, the development and evolution of crisis events in colleges and universities have an important impact on society. In the information environment, with social media as the main communication channel, the communication carrier and communication mode of college crisis events become diversified. In addition, media reports and network public opinion spread faster and deeper, and the social impact of the college crisis is more extensive and will cause a series of social problems.

The U.S. Department of Education's 2003 Practical Resource for Crisis Planning: a Guide for Schools and Communities, issued to all levels of schools, defines a college or university crisis as a crisis in which school leaders must confront and make one or more important decisions under conditions of inadequate information, time and resources. Lichtenstein defines a school crisis (school crisis)[1] as "a sudden, unanticipated event in which the school in general or a significant part may be seriously and negatively affected, usually including serious injury or death." The actors of college crisis events are college students. The frequent college crisis events in recent years are the following: academic integrity, daily management, campus safety, teacher morality, and so on. Therefore, the news media need to select and process the information about the college

crisis in what way, through what framework to highlight its connotation and meaning, and in what news picture to present the matter.

The powerful ability to guide public opinion and disseminate information is the most unique ability of the news media in society, and the exercise of this ability is crucial to and even determines the operation of any social organization. In recent years, the crisis in universities has attracted strong attention from the media and the public. In the age of information technology, if the crisis in colleges and universities is not handled properly, it will not only affect the normal teaching order, but also make the crisis management in colleges and universities out of control and produce negative social influence. The analysis of this paper focuses on the selection and highlighting of the study of media reports of college crises under the frame theory in the new media era, and exploring the value orientation of media reports and the social significance and impact produced according to the content gated by different media.

## 2 Theories related to news frames

The frames constructed by the news media provide audiences with the right to know about news events and constitute the "reality" on which we base our perception of society. Chinese scholar Pan Zhongdang also believes that frames exist in at least two places: one is implicit in the text; [2] the other is in human perception, that is, in human memory. Frames represent how social events are subjectively presented by journalists or media organizations on the one hand, and how audiences

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subjectively interpret the symbolic system of the news media on the other.

## 2.1 News framework

In 1974, Irving Goffman published his book *Framing Analysis*, which first applied the concept of "framing" to communication situations. Goffman argued that framing is an important means by which people translate social reality into subjective thought, that is, the structure of people's or organizations' subjective interpretations and thinking about events [3]. Goffman's framing theory has been widely used to analyze the organizational principles of media coverage of news events and to explore the factors that influence the media's perception of a particular group's image, which is customarily referred to as "news framing".

Huang Dan, a communication scholar in China, summarizes news framing theory as follows: First, the central issue of framing theory is the production of media, that is, how media reflect reality and regulate people's understanding of it. Second, the media reflect reality, construct meaning and regulate people's understanding, which is ultimately realized through text or discourse-media products; therefore, text construction, interpretation, or discourse production analysis is the focus of frame theory[4]. Thirdly, frame theory focuses on media production, but does not regard production as a closed process, but places production and its products (texts) in a specific context - in various relations.

The Taiwanese scholar Zang Guoren further divides frames into high-level structure, medium-level structure, and low-level structure. The high-level structure of the frame refers to the characterization of a certain subject matter; the medium level structure of the frame includes the main events, previous events, history, results, and evaluation; and the low-level structure of the frame refers to the concrete representation of the frame through language or symbols.

According to Gitlin, "media framing is the principle of selection, emphasis, and expression ..... is the process of selecting, emphasizing and excluding news stories. Media framing ensures that journalists can process large amounts of information quickly and routinely, identify it into cognitive categories, and then package it for more effective presentation to the public." Specifically in news texts news framing mainly includes the presentation of text content, some keywords, stereotypical terms, sources, news graphic structure, etc. Therefore, facing a more specific topic like a college crisis, journalism researchers should consider, when studying its media coverage, how the news frames differ from media to media in response to the same college crisis. What are the different frames of media coverage at different stages of crisis development? How does the media frame the coverage of the university crisis?

## 2.2 Audience framework

The media selectively filters and communicates complex and diverse information to the audience through frames,

constituting a mimetic environment that influences the audience's perception of the world. After years of life and cognitive accumulation, audiences have also formed their audience framework and cognitive system. In common parlance, it means that there are thousands of people, and for the college crisis, the audience will also be structured according to their audience framework. When the issue of the Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology students looking for a gunman to do their graduation design for them aroused public discussion, the focus of the audience also showed diversified characteristics, such as some views that the focus of this incident is on academic misconduct, some views that universities educate people but not morality, and some views that the phenomenon of gunmen in the academic world needs to be rectified urgently. And some audiences who do not know much about this matter, once they accept one side's view, they accept the other side's definition of this issue and reconstruct this issue.

Combining the above definitions of the frame, we can point out some common points, that is, "frame" is mainly a structure for perceiving and presenting things, highlighting specific connotations in selecting and processing things, and expressing ideas reflecting a specific cultural value [5].

## 3 Analysis of frames in college crisis reporting

### 3.1 Framework analysis of news production

The way news is disseminated in the information age has changed significantly, i.e., traditional media are no longer dominant and new media are taking over, both of which together form the overall framework of news production today. This reconfigured news framework, which has been reconstructed by the times and new conditions, provides new requirements for audiences and news producers.

News sources and news values, as important intrinsic elements of news production, are already framed and prescribed in the framework. The media and news agencies serve as the main sources of news, scattered to all corners of the world, but there is no shortage of general ideas and guidelines in line with the basic journalistic profession, which facts make news and which are just ordinary information, and news sources are filtered out layer by layer in this well-defined framework. News producers can then use the framework to find sources, the identify angles and interviewees for specific news content. As a result, some of the facts are selected for inclusion in the frame, and others are excluded due to some routine practices of journalists in obtaining news sources. In turn, news value determines the further selection of news, and the degree of importance of some news. This framing is also maintenance of balance in this process, and news values are determined by the agreement of journalists to maintain a fixed pattern of news values to maintain the balance between them.

News frames, as principles chosen in news production, are to some extent deliberately emphasized, interpreted, and presented as symbols, which involve selection and prominence, swaying the birth of news and influencing the audience's view of a specific event. In the age of information technology, news frames have their favorable aspects and require a higher level of media literacy on the part of audiences and news producers. Frames are ultimately a way and a tool, and only by taking advantage of the features and advantages can we better report news and disseminate information. The first time I saw the company, I had to go to the university to find out what it was doing. The two students involved have been suspended from defending their graduation designs. Public opinion swelled rapidly after the incident, and many media reported related information such as the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, China News Weekly, Global Network, Red Star News, Surfing News, and Observer, and the microblogging topic #Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology responded to the incident of students' graduation design doing on behalf of students# was read by more than 200 million people and discussed by more than 10,000 people, triggering widespread concern among netizens. It was not until May 30 that Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology officially issued a notice that the university's Academic Style Construction Committee confirmed the academic misconduct of Lei and Lu, and gave Lei and Lu two students one year's probation according to relevant regulations, during which they were not allowed to apply for a degree; and canceled Lu's qualification for graduate school exemption. The media coverage of such academic misconduct is bound to cause an uproar in the university community and expand the discussion of research ethics and academic misconduct to the public agenda.

In October 2018, more than one hundred papers by Liang Ying, a young Changjiang scholar, were withdrawn from major academic journals, and in 2019, Zhai Tianlin "did not know what the Internet was", and then this year, the gunman did the bibliography and other academic misconduct news reports, the majority of netizens jokingly called "Tianlin four years, Lu Lei The incident". To a certain extent, the news framework of the relevant events has been drawn up to allow the public to deliberately feel the specific impact of the public opinion environment, where academic misconduct is not a trivial matter and the environment of honest governance can take root in the news framework. Traditionally, the disclosure of academic misconduct and its treatment has been somewhat limited to the scientific community, and its impact has not entered the general public's view or generated much feedback on the public agenda. However, in recent times, media exposure and disclosure has become important way to report and expose academic misconduct[6]. The incident of Zhai Tianlin's not knowing "Zhiwang" has highlighted the importance of the public agenda or focus on exposing academic misconduct.

### **3.2 Framing theory in communication content research**

In the field of communication content research news text research, it is not difficult to find being placed at the center of frame analysis. For the news media, the frame is a regular filtering device, and the frame is like a funnel, through which the facts that fit the size of the funnel are selected and left behind, processed, or reorganized by the symbolic and ideographic elements within the frame, becoming news with the "brand" of the media. Therefore, in a sense, the content of communication produced by the media may be mixed with personal subjective factors or the competition of various power institutions.

All major media have different frame settings based on different attributes, audiences, and positions. The development of education is very significant for a country, especially for a country in rapid development like China, it has special significance and the public has high expectations of education, and some crisis events in colleges and universities are often more likely to attract public attention and discussion. Therefore, colleges and universities as a special group environment, the report of college crisis, the monitoring of public opinion after the report, and the subsequent public opinion guidance and public reaction are especially important. In recent years, central-level mainstream media such as Xinhua News Agency and People's Daily play the role of official mainstream media in reporting college crisis events, while the reporting framework of some online media may have the characteristics of diversification, extremism, and entertainment based on the attributes of the audience groups they are facing[7]. Once these features take over the main role, they will mislead the audience and influence them to view and analyze the events rationally and fairly, and then affect the development of public opinion.

#### **3.2.1 Information Sources**

Information sources are seen as an important variable in news framing. At the beginning of the creation of a college crisis, information sources tend to be mainly conventional sources. And after the incident fermented and attracted widespread attention, information sources rapidly increased, and official sources and private sources expanded. Take Zhai Tianlin's academic misconduct incident as an example, in February 2019, Zhai Tianlin claimed in a live broadcast that he "did not know what Zhiwang was", and the authenticity of his doctorate caused netizens to question. Then he claimed on Weibo that he was "just joking", at which point the news media relied on conventional sources of information, namely the direct parties involved in the incident.

However, this statement did not reduce the heat of public discussion, and subsequently, Beijing Film Academy, Peking University Guanghua School of

Management, and Zhai Tianlin's academic misconduct were investigated in public statements. The sources of information reported by the media at this time

were official sources and private sources. In this incident, the sources of news reports of People's Daily and Xinhua News Agency are official sources, which pay more attention to authenticity and authority. The sources of the online media were more extensive, which aroused public discussion on social phenomena such as "academic misconduct" and "social fairness" and expanded the controversy.

### 3.2.2 Selection of topics

As a special type of event, the coverage of the college crisis and the subsequent direction of public opinion have far-reaching effects on society. The topic of the college crisis is undoubtedly a hot topic for online media to arouse audiences' reading interest. When organizing reports, their topics tend to seek novel angles, while some of them maliciously cause confrontation and even worsen the impact of the event. And after the college crisis aroused attention, the reports of various online media further expanded public opinion, and the breadth and depth of discussion gradually expanded. When the incident rises to the level of academic integrity, daily management, campus safety, and teachers' morality, and causes adverse social influence, the official mainstream media will report on the topic, to provide good social guidance. Take Zhai Tianlin's case as an example, Xinhua published "Zhai Tianlin's case is not only academic misconduct", People's Daily published "The best persona is self", Global Daily published "I hope Zhai Tianlin's case will form a wide deterrent", and Beijing Daily commented on the case. " and "Beijing Daily" commented "I hope there will be less 'tofu-dreg' persona projects", which tracked and analyzed the incident and attracted wide public attention. Compared with the broad and diversified choice of topics of college crisis events by online media, the official mainstream media shows more characteristics of targeting and guiding.

## 3.3 Framing theory in communication effectiveness research

The framing effect is another significant manifestation of the framing effect in the field of news communication, where news production and communication content have specific media effects on particular content. Unlike agenda-setting theory, framing analysis focuses not only on what people think, but also on how they think.

### 3.3.1 Irrational framework results

Most of the frame clues in mass communication in the information era originate from self-media, which determines that the more open the self-media is, the greater the frame risk is. Another example is the case of Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology students doing their bibliography on behalf of the students. With the push of public opinion, more and more media organizations began to pay attention to this matter, ranging from the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, Li Zhi News, Observer.com, and Peng

Pang News to countless WeChat public numbers and opinion leaders of major platforms reprinting and reporting, making this event dominate the hot search list of major platforms at that time. At the same time, platform users were also discussing and analyzing the event as individuals, fully demonstrating the openness and rapidity of the information age. The timeliness of the platform means that more and more communicators can become recipients for the first time. In the era of self-media, the public can immediately post information sources related to themselves without rational processing to the self-media platform, turning the sources into risky framing clues in mass communication quickly, and the more open the framing clues are, the more framing risks continue to be superimposed. The existence of framing risks led to many extreme and unwise discussions of this incident at the time, with some arguing that the punishment was too lenient, and some netizens even steering it into gender antagonism and stirring up disputes.

### 3.3.2 Negativity of framework content

News communication is susceptible to the influence of the plurality of communication subjects, more subjective and tendentious, and negative and negative emotions will increase. In the information age, the subjects, objects, Methods, and channels in mass communication activities have undergone subversive changes. News sources evolve into opinion frames with certain communication directions through public dispersal. Then the negative attributes of frame cues will also turn into frame contents with negative emotional pointers[8].

In response to the #Xi'an University of Electronic Science and Technology's response to the student's graduation design incident, the audience showed different views, but subjectivity and tendency made the netizens' views mostly negative emotions: first, they thought that hiring someone to do the graduation design for them was academic misconduct and hoped that the university would make serious punishment for the students involved under the regulations; second, they thought that the students involved had poor conduct and questioned the existence of shady practices in their examinations; third, they called it "the first year of Lu Lei" and were worried that the graduation audit of universities would be tightened after this incident; fourth, they dug deeper into the information of the students involved and the follow-up of the incident, and expressed dissatisfaction with the university's indifferent attitude. The third one is that the university has called "the first year of Lu Lei" and is worried that the graduation audit of universities will be stricter after this incident; the fourth one is to dig deeper into the information of the students involved and the follow-up of the incident, and expresses dissatisfaction with the school's indifferent treatment attitude; the fifth one is related to the previous incident of the university's graduate school couple cheating the poor students' subsidy, and thinks that the school's enrollment work may be affected as a result; the sixth one is that some The netizens sarcastically called

the students involved "fairies" and were criticized for stirring up the confrontation between men and women ..... The negativity of the frame attribute is specifically expressed in the new communication ecology as the negative emotion of the communication event, and this negative emotion is generated by the source of the frame cue, which gradually dissolves and deepens in the communication frame of the whole media, and finally affects the decision.

### 3.3.3 Irrationality of the framework results

In the information age, especially the non-traditional nature of information dissemination on the self-media platform makes framing cues with high risk and negative framing content spread geometrically, gathering more complex and irrational framing results of communication. Such framing results inevitably lead to irrational opinion tendencies, which are more likely to cause the collapse of the positive frame of audience psychology and induce public social behavior backlash. The student hired a "gunman" to do the graduation design for him and asked for a refund, and was reported by the "gunman", and the chat records that were revealed attracted numerous netizens to watch and troll. Academic falsification, student conduct issues, and school spirit construction issues have been criticized by all parties, bringing a large negative impact on the reputation of the school. After the incident triggered a heated debate, the school quickly responded to the matter, but the decision to "suspend two students from defending their bachelor's degree" did not satisfy public opinion. Some netizens continued to question, further digging and other negative events related to the school, which brought more pressure to the school. In addition, the irrational expressions such as the uncontrolled dissemination of private information about the students involved, the malicious mockery to provoke the confrontation between men and women, and even the defense of the "shooter" on behalf of the students, also put pressure on the guidance of public opinion.

The development of social media platforms in the information era has dissolved the framework structure of traditional news media and made the communication environment more complex. Especially in the reporting of sudden public crisis events in universities and the public relations processing of universities themselves, the riskiness of the whole media itself increases the uncertainty of information dissemination, which requires the media reporting and public relations processing to change its inherent discourse system and actively adapt to the media usage habits of Internet users, to win the trust of more audiences. At the same time, it is also necessary to speed up the pace of deep media integration development, build a communication platform for the integration of old and new media, and construct a space for guiding media opinion in the context of integration. Although the investigation of academic misconduct cannot rely on the media, the media can still play a proper role in the process of combating academic misconduct, such as following up the investigation of academic misconduct and announcing the progress on

time, letting the public understand the serious consequences arising from academic misconduct, and reporting the results of the treatment of academic misconduct, to maintain a positive image of scientific research and public trust in science. In addition, the media can also assist the academic community to do a good job in this regard by reporting to preach scientific ethics and academic style building.

## 4 Conclusions.

The development of social media platforms in the information era has dissolved the framework structure of traditional news media and made the communication environment more complex. Especially in the reporting of sudden public crisis events in universities and the public relations processing of universities themselves, the riskiness of the whole media itself increases the uncertainty of information dissemination, which requires the media reporting and public relations processing to change its inherent discourse system and actively adapt to the media usage habits of Internet users, to win the trust of more audiences. At the same time, it is also necessary to speed up the pace of deep media integration and development, build a communication platform for the integration of old and new media, and construct a space for guiding media opinion in the context of integration.

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