

Valenced news frames and public support for the EU

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Abstract

Previous research on framing focuses either on frames in the news or framing effects. This multi-method study investigated first of all how a key European Union summit was framed in the national news of three European countries. Secondly, it looked at the effects of the news media coverage on support for the EU and for the enlargement of the EU. A content analysis of 717 newspaper and television news stories in Great Britain, Germany, and The Netherlands showed that the summit was primarily framed in terms of political-institutional consequences and that the overall valence of the news was disadvantageous towards the EU and EU enlargement. An experiment was conducted to investigate the effects of the valence of television news. A sample of 207 participants was randomly assigned to news framing the consequences of the summit as either 'advantageous' or as 'disadvantageous'. Participants exposed to disadvantageously framed news showed lower levels of general EU support and specific support for the EU enlargement and considered more negative than positive aspects of the enlargement than participants exposed to advantageously framed news.

Keywords: Framing, EU, public opinion, television news, experiment, valence

Introduction

Previous research investigating antecedents of public perceptions of and attitudes towards European integration has focused on party identification, political values, economic expectations, and cost-benefit considerations (e. g., Gabel, 1998; Hewstone, 1986; Inglehart, 1990). However, extant research has – with few exceptions (e. g., Banducci, Karp, and Lauf, 2002; Norris, 2000; Peter, 2003; de Vreese, 2002) – been largely negligent of the effects of media on support for further integration. This

seems surprising given that television and newspapers are repeatedly named by Europeans as their most important source of political information (Eurobarometer: 51–56).

Drawing on framing theory, initial investigations have analyzed the portrayal of the EU in news media. In a content analysis of print and television news, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) found that stories about Europe were most frequently framed in terms of attribution of responsibility, economic consequences, and conflict. In a comparative analysis of news about the launch of the euro in four European countries, de Vreese, Peter, and Semetko (2001) found the conflict frame to dominate economic and political news in general. News dealing specifically with the introduction of the euro was more frequently framed in terms of economic consequences. Investigating the effects of such news frames on readers' thoughts and recall, Valkenburg, Semetko, and de Vreese (1999) found that reading a news article about the introduction of the euro led participants to utilize the news frame in their subsequent thoughts. In fact, de Vreese (2002) found that a news frame can be as important to audiences when conceiving of political issues as the core informational facts in a news story, which suggests that news frames are an important resource to citizens when thinking about European issues.

While the studies described above and other framing studies show that news has the ability to provide a template for audiences' understanding of political issues, little attention has been devoted to the *nature* of news frames. Frames are not merely different ways of telling a news story. Frames may cause changes in public opinion by inviting certain definitions and interpretations of political issues. Entman (1993) suggests that frames promote a 'moral evaluation' and Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, and Vig (2000: 804) argue that "frames can imply policy options or implicit answers to questions of what should be done about an issue." This goes beyond stressing different aspects of an issue and additionally suggests that frames may have normative implications.

The latter studies imply that frames oftentimes have inherent *valence* by suggesting, for example, positive or negative aspects, solutions, or treatments. Given this valence, news frames can be expected to influence public support for various policy measures. Only a few studies in political communication have investigated the appearance and effect of frames with an inherent valence, i. e., depicting an issue in clearly positive or negative terms. In other areas of communication research, such as health communication, the effects of framing issues in terms of good-bad or positive-negative dichotomies are well known (e. g., Rothman and Salovey, 1997). However, this still remains to be investigated in the context of mediated communication about political issues. Consequently the goal of this study is to examine the valence of certain frames in news

reporting and to explore the degree to which this valuation in news frames affects public support. As the context for this study we chose one of the most significant developments in contemporary Europe: the enlargement of the European Union.

Valenced news frames

The concept of framing has received an increasing amount of attention in the field of political communication. Studies show, for example, the influence of strategy-framed and issue-framed news on campaign interpretation (Rhee, 1997), the influence of news framing and individual values on political candidate choice (Domke, Shah, and Wackman, 1998), the effects of advocacy frames in the media on students' support for local political issues (Tewksbury et al., 2000), and the impact of framing a civil liberty conflict on participants' tolerance (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley, 1997). Despite this growing amount of research, the concept of framing has not yet "settled on a core theory or even a basic set of propositions" (Hertog and McLeod, 2001: 139), and the nature of frames is insufficiently explicated.

In framing research, a distinction is made between how news is presented, or framed, and how audiences comprehend and respond to these frames (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Gitlin (1980: 7) refers to framing as an instrument to "organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports". Thus, on the one hand media frames are identified, whereas on the other hand framing effects are examined. Consequently, framing analysis is directed towards an understanding of the relationship between issues presented in varying news outlets and the public's perception of these modes of presentation. When synthesizing previous research on news frames, a distinction can be made between studies examining *generic* or *issue-specific* frames (de Vreese, 2002). Issue-specific frames are relevant only for certain specific issues or events, and generic frames can be applied to a broad range of topics, hereby exceeding thematic, cultural or time limitations.

In addition, however, we may consider some frames to be inherently valenced while others appear to be more neutral. By valence we mean that some frames are indicative of 'good and bad' and (implicitly) carry positive and/or negative elements. On the one hand, for example, Entman's (1991) study of the news coverage of airline accidents showed how frames carry implicit valuations. He found that a US airline accident was framed in terms of 'tragedy' and 'mistake', whereas a comparable accident of a Soviet airplane was dominantly framed in terms of 'attack' and 'deliberate'.¹ On the other hand, frames such as the conflict

frame which juxtaposes two opposing views may not necessarily offer specific evaluations on an issue.

Examples of frames that have inherent valence include the 'Cold War' frame (Norris, 1995). The 'Cold War' frame depicted international events in terms of rivalry between two major superpowers and defined other countries as 'friends' or 'enemies' of these superpowers. This frame has similarities to the 'Dictatorship-Democracy' frame; i. e., by means of a clear polarization between friends and enemies, dictators and democratic leaders, or between good and bad, the frame carries an inherent valence. Another study analyzing the media coverage of labor conflicts in the US again makes an implicit distinction between more positive or more negative framing of the issue. Martin and Oshagan (1997) analyzed press and network news coverage of the closing down of a General Motors plant and found that a 'no option' frame dominated the news coverage, compared to an 'alternative' frame in which the closing of the plant was challenged and alternatives were offered.

Recently, van Gorp (2002) analyzed the representation of asylum seekers in Belgian news. He operationalized two frames, 'asylum seekers are innocent victims' and 'asylum seekers are profiteers and criminals', which carry clear valuations of the issue at stake. He found that the use of these frames depended mainly on the newspapers' political orientation and on the target audience of the paper. Furthermore, Rössler (2001) investigated how the rise of the Internet was framed in German news media, particular whether there was generally a more positive or negative assessment of the Internet. He found that more than three-quarters of all articles framed the Internet positively. A strong example of valenced news frames is provided by Conrad (2001) who analyzed the framing of genetic discussions in the news. He found that a 'genetic optimism' frame, one that dominated US newspapers in the 1980s, continued to prevail even when the medical community increasingly signaled dangers of this type of research. The article predicts that a more balanced 'genetic optimism' and 'genetic pessimism' will coexist in the future to counter the existing, somewhat 'distorted' representation of genetics in the US news.

Effects of valenced news frames

Moving beyond previous content analytic investigations of valenced frames, a number of studies have dealt with the *effects* of such frames. McLeod and Detenber (1999), for example, investigated the influence that the framing of television coverage of an anarchist protest had on viewers' support for the protest. The stories differed in the presentation of the protesters, ranging from a more positive to a more negative

portrayal of the protesters. The inherent valence of the frames significantly affected viewers so that less support in the news led viewers to be more critical of and less likely to identify with the protesters, less critical of the police, and less likely to support expressive rights. Along similar lines, Nelson et al. (1997) investigated the effects of framing a Ku Klux Klan rally either in terms of 'disruption of public order' or as a 'free speech issue', where one frame was again more positive about the issue than the other. They found significant framing effects on the tolerance towards KKK speeches or rallies among the viewers in the positive 'free speech' framing condition compared to those in the negative 'public order disruption' condition.

The review of extant research suggests that a number of studies in political communication have implicitly investigated both the use and effects of valenced frames. However, none of these studies has explicitly addressed the nature of the frames or hypothesized about the impact of the valence on citizens' attitudes towards policy issues. In other disciplines, however, several studies discuss the effects of the positive or negative framing of an issue. In psychology, for example, Tversky and Kahneman (1981; see also Levin and Chapman, 1993) argued that psychological principles that govern the perception of decision problems and the evaluation of alternatives and outcomes produce predictable shifts of preference when the same problem is framed in different ways. According to prospect theory, outcomes are expressed as positive or negative deviations (gains or losses) from a neutral reference outcome. When making choices involving gains, people are often risk-averse and when making choices involving losses, often risk-taking.

In health communication, "gain- and loss-framed messages are constructed by the presentation of a specific outcome, such that it appears as a benefit or a cost in relation to a specific reference point" (Rothman and Salovey, 1997). For example, embedding HIV testing information within a frame emphasizing a personal loss led 63% women in a negative framing condition to show up to test for HIV within a two-week period, compared to 23% in a positive/ gain condition and none in the control condition (Kalichman and Coley, 1995). Similarly, one study compared the effectiveness of gain- versus loss-framed messages to persuade women to obtain mammography screening (Banks, Salovey, Greener, Rothman, Moyer, Beauvais, and Epel, 1995). The gain-framed (showing benefits of obtaining mammography) and loss-framed (showing risks of not obtaining mammography) videos were factually equivalent. It was found that women who viewed the loss-framed message were more likely to obtain mammography within twelve months of seeing the information.

Research questions and hypotheses

This study investigates the presence and effects of valenced frames in the realm of political communication. In order to investigate the valence of news frames and possible effects on public opinion we chose the December 2000 EU summit in Nice, France.² The Nice summit was of major importance for the future development of the EU and most important national politicians (heads of states and foreign ministers) took part in the summit. The summit was a suitable context to investigate the presence of valenced news frames in a cross-national perspective as countries' support for European integration may affect the valence of the news frames.

First we established a baseline of the amount of news coverage devoted to the summit. Based on previous research (e. g., Norris, 2000), we hypothesized that the broadsheet press and public broadcasting news programs would cover the summit more extensively than the tabloid press and commercial television news programs:

Hypothesis 1: The visibility of EU news in more serious news outlets (broadsheets and public broadcasting news programs) is higher than in more sensationalistic oriented outlets (tabloids and commercial news programs).

Secondly, we posed a research question investigating whether news about the summit was primarily framed in positive or negative terms, that is, in terms of advantages or disadvantages of the consequences of the summit.

Research question: Is the framing of the summit in newspapers and television news positive, neutral or negative?

Previous framing studies found that media frames may indeed have an effect on individuals' attitudes (Entman, 1993; Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Nelson and Oxley (1999) and Tewksbury et al. (2000) specifically found that exposure to news frames with an inherent valence affected public support for political issues such as agriculture regulation and land development. A set of hypotheses was therefore cautiously formulated:

Hypothesis 2a: Exposure to advantageously framed news has a positive effect on support for the EU and the enlargement of the EU.

Hypothesis 2b: Exposure to disadvantageously framed news has a negative effect on support for the EU and the enlargement of the EU.

Method

To investigate the presence and effects of valenced news frames, a multi-method study was designed which involved a content analysis of news media coverage and a controlled experiment investigating the effects of the coverage.

Content analysis

Country sample. The content analysis was carried out in Great Britain, Germany, and the Netherlands. These three countries represent variation in terms of size and aggregate-level public support for European integration in general and EU enlargement in particular which may affect the valence of news frames.

Outlet sample. The analysis included national newspapers and television news as these are the key resources for political information (Eurobarometer, 56, 2002). Two newspapers from each of the three different countries were included: *The Times* and *Sun* (Great Britain), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and *Bild* (Germany), *de Volkskrant* and *Telegraaf* (The Netherlands). These newspapers all have high circulation rates in their particular countries. Moreover, with this sample both 'serious'/broadsheet and 'sensationalist'/tabloid outlets are included. For each paper, the front-page was analyzed to identify articles dealing with the EU summit in Nice. Two main evening television news programs from each country were included in the analysis: *BBC News* and *ITV News* (Great Britain), *Tagesschau* and *RTL Aktuell* (Germany), *NOS Journaal* and *RTL4 Nieuws* (The Netherlands). For each country the most widely watched public broadcasting and commercial newscast was included. Each news program was analyzed in its entirety (excluding commercial breaks, sports news, and the weather forecast).

Period of study. The content analysis was conducted over a period of eight days from December 5–12, 2000. This includes both the summit and the surrounding days. A total of 48 news programs and 42 newspaper front-pages were analyzed which included 193 newspaper articles and a total of 524 television news stories.³

Coding procedure. Coding was conducted by one coder with German and Dutch as native language and fluency in English. A reliability test of 25% of the material with three coders speaking all languages yielded satisfactory results (reported below). The unit of analysis and coding unit was the distinct news story, defined for print as at least ten lines (thus excluding headlines and bullets).

Measures

Visibility of EU news. All news stories were coded for dealing with the EU or not.⁴ Further, it was coded whether the stories dealt explicitly with the Nice summit. The number of stories was counted. For television news, the length of the stories (in seconds) was measured for reasons of comparability as the programs differed in length and some opted for few, lengthier stories.

News frames. Multiple item-scales were used to measure the presence of three news frames that all deal with *consequences* of an event (Gamson, 1992; Sotirovic, 2000): *economic* consequences, *political-institutional* consequences, and *social-cultural* consequences. The economic consequences frame “reports an event, problem, or issue in terms of the consequences it will have economically on an individual, group, institution, region, or country” (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000: 96). The political-institutional consequences frame reports on an issue in terms of political and institutional consequences it will have on groups, the EU as an organization as well as member states and applicant countries. The social-cultural consequences frame reports on an issue in terms of social and cultural consequences it will have on groups, organizations and countries.

Four questions per frame were developed. Each of these was answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’. For the questions identifying the economical consequences frame, we drew on measures developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The operationalization of the other two frames was similar.⁵ The internal consistency of the scales were: for the economic consequences frame $\alpha = .68$, for the political-institutional consequences frame $\alpha = .82$, and for the social-cultural consequences $\alpha = .78$. The inter-coder reliability for this measure was 82%.

Valence. To investigate the valence of the news framing, each story was classified as portraying the consequences of the summit as either advantageous or disadvantageous. This was done using a 5-point scale ranging from very advantageous (1) to neutral (3) and very disadvantageous (5). In the presentation of the results we classified the ends of the scale so that each story was either classified as advantageous, neutral or disadvantageous. The inter-coder reliability for this measure was 89%.

Experiment

Design. To test the effects of valenced news frames, we used a single-factor, post-test only, between-subjects experimental design with random assignment to one of two conditions. One condition represented an advantageous political-institutional frame, the other a disadvantageous political-institutional frame. We opted for an experimental design to increase the internal validity of the study and to be able to ascribe differences in the findings to our experimental manipulation more confidently. Notwithstanding the pitfalls of experimental research, such as ‘good subject behavior’ (Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1997), experimentation is a superior way of establishing causality in media effects research.

Procedure. The study was carried out over seven weekdays in the spring of 2002. The subjects were told that they participated in a project

conducted by the Communications Department at the University of Amsterdam. Upon arrival, participants were randomly assigned to either of the two conditions.⁶ Participants first completed a pre-test questionnaire containing demographics, political interest, involvement and ideological preferences, political efficacy, news media use, and knowledge about the EU. Next, participants were exposed to a television news story that either framed the enlargement of the EU in an advantageous or disadvantageous manner. Participants sat in a semicircle of chairs around a table approximately three meters in front of a television screen to watch one of the experimental news stories. Subsequent to the exposure to the news, participants completed a post-test questionnaire which probed participants for their opinions about EU matters. Furthermore, questions were asked concerning participants' opinion about the euro and about security issues. These were not expected to be affected by the experimental manipulation. Questionnaires were completed on computers in individually assigned cubicles. Upon completion of the final questionnaire participants were debriefed. The entire procedure lasted about 30 to 40 minutes.

Sample. A total of 207 first-year students, 81 men and 126 women, served as volunteer research participants. The students were recruited from a broad range of departments of the University of Amsterdam and the Free University of Amsterdam. They received a small financial compensation for participation (€ 8,-). Students were tested in mixed gender groups, which varied in size from two to eight students.

Stimulus material. The experimental material consisted of two stories taken from original television news broadcasts. Both stories were aired during the EU summit in December 2000 and dealt with political-institutional consequences of the preparation for the enlargement of the EU, as proposed by the Treaty of Nice.⁷ The news stories about the EU summit were aired by two different national Dutch broadcasters: *NOS* and *RTL4*. The length of the stories was 4 minutes 35 seconds and 4 minutes 50 seconds respectively. Both stories dealt with the political-institutional consequences of the EU enlargement procedure and featured an introduction by the anchor, video footage of the summit with reporter's voice over, figures explaining the purpose of the summit (e.g., composition of the EU commission, voting power of member states, and the use of the veto right), and a cross-talk between the anchor in the news studio and the EU-correspondent. One of the stories included additional footage providing background information about the EU. While many features of the stories were similar, the stories differed in tone of evaluation of the consequences of the summit which constituted the experimental manipulation.

The disadvantageous evaluation of consequences was broadcast by *RTL4*. It specifically emphasized the fact that the Dutch government was hardly able to influence the results of the summit, which led to the establishment of the Treaty of Nice which contained various aspects that were unfavorable for the Netherlands.⁸ To emphasize the 'failures' of the Dutch delegation, the story featured a visualization in which the words 'veto' and 'voting power' were crossed out with a big red cross. In the dialogue between anchor and correspondent, these issues were again presented as having disadvantageous effects. The outcomes of the summit were described as being a lean and poor accord, reflecting on the EU as not being able to reach agreements in order to prepare for enlargement.

The advantageous evaluation of consequences was broadcast by the *NOS*. Here, the enlargement procedure of the EU and the necessary institutional changes were portrayed as being largely advantageous for the future of the Union. The transformations in decision-making, including voting power and the use of the veto, were mainly seen as necessary preliminary steps towards the broader goal of establishing peace, security and prosperity on the European continent.⁹

General support for the EU. Participants' general support for the European Union was measured by means of five items on 7-point scales, ranging from 'fully disagree' to 'fully agree': (1) Membership of the Netherlands in the EU is a good thing; (2) The Netherlands benefit from membership in the European Union; (3) I personally benefit from Dutch membership in the EU; (4) The EU is important for my professional future; (5) Membership in the EU is important for the future of The Netherlands. Responses were averaged in order to create a measure of general support for the EU ranging from 1 to 7 with Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$.

Support for enlargement of the EU. Support for EU enlargement was measured using five items on 7-point scales: (1) Enlargement of the EU is a good thing; (2) The enlargement will be important for the future of the EU; (3) The Netherlands will benefit from the enlargement of the EU; (4) I will personally benefit from the enlargement of the EU; (5) The enlargement of the EU will have negative effects on the Dutch economy. Responses were recoded when needed and averaged to an index of support of the EU enlargement ranging from 1 to 7 with an $\alpha = .75$.

Evaluation EU. An open-ended thought-listing measure asking participants to provide their general thoughts and feelings that come to mind when thinking about the EU was used to investigate evaluations of the EU. Each thought was coded as positive, neutral or negative.

Advantages of EU enlargement. A second open-ended question asked participants to list potential advantageous and disadvantageous consequences of the enlargement. The total number of both advantages and disadvantages was then counted.

Control variables. In addition to the effect of exposure to the valenced news frames, other variables were predicted to affect the nature of participants' responses. Based on previous research, it was expected that political knowledge, political efficacy, and the degree of issue elaboration would influence the responses (Pinkleton and Austin, 2002; Price, Tewksbury, and Powers 1997; Rhee, 1997). Political knowledge and political efficacy were expected to be positive predictors of EU support. Issue elaboration, measured as verbosity (i. e., number of words listed for the open-ended question), was included as an individual-level control to ensure that differences in the open-ended answers were not artifacts of the volume of the answer as suggested by Rhee (1997). Political knowledge was measured by seven factual questions, averaged to range from 0 to 1 ($M = .15$, $SD = .18$).¹⁰ Internal political efficacy was measured by six standard items and averaged to form a scale from 1 to 7 ($M = 4.46$, $SD = .75$).¹¹

Between-condition comparisons were made while simultaneously assessing the influence of exposure to the experimental news stories and controlling for the intervening variables. This was done using OLS regression analyses.

Results

The visibility of news about the European Union was measured as the number of news stories, which made up, on average, 10% of all the news during the period. Of the 717 news stories coded in both newspapers and television news, 72 items were related to the EU. Of these 72 items, 60 dealt directly with the EU summit in Nice. Table 1 summarizes the visibility of the news coverage in the different news outlets and countries. There were no discernable differences in the visibility of the summit between the three countries. There were considerable differences, however, in the visibility between the different media outlets. By and large, broadsheets and public broadcasting news outlets covered the EU summit more extensively than tabloids and news broadcasts on commercial stations. Using the length measure for television news (Table 1) it was found that, on average, public service broadcasting stations devoted a comparable amount of time to news about the EU in the period of analysis (between 19% and 22%). Commercial broadcasters spent a smaller proportion of time on this issue (13% to 21%) which confirms Hypothesis 1.

Table 1. *Visibility of EU summit news in British, Dutch, and German national news media.*

	Great Britain		Germany		The Netherlands	
	The Times	The Sun	SZ	Bild	Volkskrant	Telegraaf
Number of articles	6	1	5	3	5	3
	BBC (n = 6)	ITV (n = 6)	ARD (n = 7)	RTL (n = 6)	NOS (n = 6)	RTL (n = 6)
Percentage of total news	20.4	21.0	19.1	13.1	22.2	16.8

Note: Entries refer to number of front page-articles in daily newspapers and percentage of time for television news.

Framing of EU news

The analysis of the frames used in the different media outlets to report on the EU summit showed that the issue was predominantly framed in terms of political-institutional consequences, regardless of medium, outlet, or country in which the story appeared. The other frames focusing on consequences were not used frequently. Multi-item scales for each frame were constructed by adding the scores for each item and dividing this by the total number of items. For reasons of clarity in the data presentation each story was classified as containing one frame.

As shown in Table 2, 75% (n = 45) of the stories about the summit were framed in terms of political-institutional consequences while 7% (n = 4) was framed in terms of economic consequences and 18% (n = 11)

Table 2. *Percentage positive and negative framing of EU enlargement in British, Dutch, and German newspapers and television news.*

	Disadvantageous (n = 31)	Neutral (n = 16)	Advantageous (n = 13)
Economic consequences frame (n = 4)	2	3	2
Political-institutional consequences frame (n = 45)	32	23	20
Social-cultural consequences frame (n = 11)	18	0	0
Total	52	26	22

Note: Entries are percentages of the total number of stories (n = 60).

Table 3. *Support for European integration and EU enlargement (OLS).*

	Support for European integration	Support for EU enlargement
Experimental condition (advantageous = 1)	.21 ** (.12)	.13 * (.12)
Political efficacy	.18 ** (.08)	.09 (.08)
Political knowledge	.19 ** (.32)	.13 * (.32)
Adjusted R ²	.13	.05
n	207	207

Note: Entries are standardized Beta-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

in terms of social-cultural consequences. For each of the three frames, the valence was assessed, that is whether the consequences were portrayed as being advantageous or disadvantageous. Overall, 26% ($n = 16$) of the items portrayed the consequences neutrally, whereas 52% ($n = 31$) focused on disadvantageous consequences. The remaining 22% ($n = 13$) of the items portrayed consequences as being advantageous. The findings did not suggest any structural differences between countries or outlet types in terms of the valence of the news frames. In other words, the content analysis suggested a fairly homogeneous framing and valence of the coverage of the summit in the three countries and 12 news outlets.

Effects on support for the EU and EU enlargement

Turning to the results from the experiment, we found that participants in the advantageous condition displayed a higher level of general support for the EU ($M = 5.02$, $SD = .78$) compared to participants in the disadvantageous condition ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .92$). In addition they were more supportive of the enlargement ($M = 4.30$, $SD = .88$) than participants exposed to the disadvantageous story ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .87$). This confirms hypotheses 2a and 2b with a significant between-condition difference in the expected direction.¹²

To test for the simultaneous influence of political efficacy, political knowledge, and exposure to either positive or negative news about the summit, a regression model was tested. As Table 3 shows the effects of the control variables were significant in the expected direction. Political knowledge and political efficacy both contributed to support for the EU and for the enlargement. The main effect of exposure to advantageous news was still significant and the most powerful predictor after adjustment for the control variables.

Table 4. *Evaluation of the EU (OLS).*

	Number of positive thoughts	Number of neutral thoughts	Number of negative thoughts
Experimental condition (advantageous = 1)	.33 *** (.14)	-.04 (.16)	-.25 *** (.15)
Political efficacy	.09 (.09)	.07 (.11)	-.14 ** (.10)
Political knowledge	.02 (.37)	-.01 (.44)	.00 (.39)
Verbosity	.48 *** (.03)	.52 *** (.04)	.61 *** (.04)
Adjusted R ²	.33	.27	.43
N	207	207	207

Note: Entries are standardized Beta-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.
*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Evaluation of the EU

The open-ended question concerning thoughts about the EU was coded for the presence of positive, neutral, and negative thoughts. Participants in the advantageous condition on average listed more positive statements ($M = 1.36$, $SD = 1.38$) compared to participants in the disadvantageous category ($M = .53$, $SD = .83$). Conversely, participants in the disadvantageous condition listed more negative statements ($M = 1.73$, $SD = 1.54$) than participants in the advantageous condition ($M = 1.01$, $SD = 1.13$). There was no significant difference between the conditions in the volume of neutral thoughts.

To test for the simultaneous influence of political efficacy, knowledge, and exposure to news three regression models were run. As Table 4 shows, the effects of exposure to valenced news significantly affected the volume of negative and positive evaluations of the EU. The effects of the control variables were in the expected direction. After controlling for verbosity, political efficacy was a significantly negative predictor of listing negative thoughts.

Effects on perception of (dis)advantages

Participants in the advantageous condition listed, on average, more advantages of the EU enlargement ($M = 1.79$, $SD = 1.04$) than participants from the disadvantageous condition ($M = 1.30$, $SD = .95$). Conversely, participants in the disadvantageous condition listed more disadvantages of the EU enlargement ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .89$) than participants in the advantageous condition ($M = 1.37$, $SD = .75$).

Table 5. Reference to advantages and disadvantages of EU enlargement (OLS).

	Number of advantages	Number of disadvantages
Experimental condition (advantageous = 1)	.16 *** (.08)	-.20 *** (.08)
Political efficacy	.06 (.06)	-.07 (.06)
Political knowledge	-.03 (.22)	.04 (.22)
Verbosity	.79 *** (.03)	.69 *** (.03)
Adjusted R ²	.67	.48
N	207	207

Note: Entries are standardized Beta-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses.
*** p < .001.

As Table 5 shows, the effects of exposure to valenced news significantly affected the volume of both advantages and disadvantages. The effects of the control variables (with the exception of verbosity) were not significant.

Discussion

This study advanced previous research on news frames and framing effects in political communication by adding the perspective of the *valence* of frames. This research trajectory had been alluded to previously, but had neither been explicated nor put to an empirical test. We analyzed the presence and effects of valenced news frames in the coverage of a common political event in a cross-national perspective.

In the analysis of six newspapers and six television news programs from three European Union countries – Germany, the Netherlands, and Great Britain – over a period of eight days around the EU summit in Nice in December 2000, we investigated the visibility of the summit, the use of three different media frames for covering the summit, and the inherent valence of these media frames. The design allows for cross-country and between-outlet comparisons. The content analysis revealed that EU related news took up about 10% of the more than 700 news stories included in the sample. Most of this news dealt specifically with the summit. Whereas the differences in visibility of EU news between countries were marginal, we found considerable variation in reporting between broadsheets and public broadcasting news, on the one hand, and tabloid papers and commercial television news outlets on the other hand. Overall, public broadcasting news programs and broadsheet news-

papers covered EU more and in longer articles or lengthier television news items than their commercial and more sensationalist counterparts.

We investigated the use of an 'economic consequences', a 'political-institutional consequences', and a 'social-cultural consequences' frame in the coverage of the Nice summit. The content analysis demonstrated that the summit was predominantly framed in terms of political-institutional consequences; i. e., news focusing on the political implications of the summit, both domestically and for the European Union. No considerable differences in framing were found between medium, outlet, or country in which the story appeared. In order to identify the inherent valence of the media frames, we analyzed whether the consequences were portrayed as being advantageous, neutral, or disadvantageous. About half of the news was framed disadvantageously (52%) compared to one-fourth neutral and one-fourth that was framed advantageously.

The important contribution of the content analysis is the investigation of the news framing of an event and the inherent values carried by these frames. Although previous research investigated the use or the impact of implicitly valenced frames, no study thus far explicitly and purposely focused on valenced frames. We found that the consequences frames under investigation indeed frequently carried an either positive or negative evaluation of the issue at stake. This presents a new, and considering the impact of valenced frames as outlined below, notable contribution to framing analysis.

Based on the findings of the content analysis, we investigated the impact of valenced frames on participants' policy support. We expected advantageous framing to positively contribute to participants' policy support, in contrast to disadvantageous framing that was expected to have a negative effect on support for the EU and EU enlargement. The experiment revealed significant effects on the four dependent variables in the expected direction. Specifically, we found that exposure to a disadvantageous framing of the summit contributed to a more negative evaluation of the enlargement and less support for the EU, relative to exposure to an advantageous framing of the event.

These results confirm the hypotheses that valenced frames indeed have a capacity to affect policy support. This is particularly important, as earlier research has shown that frames not carrying an inherent valence do have effects on issue interpretation and political cynicism, but not on policy support (de Vreese, 2002). Thereby it is implied that valenced frames are more powerful in influencing public support of certain policy issues than un-valenced media frames. The impact of valenced framing on support for EU policy is important to consider in the process of public opinion formation about further European integration.

Our study is merely a first step towards disentangling the different types of news frames and their differential effects on several dependent measures. More work is needed on the classification and nature of frames and their implications. The study has a number of shortcomings that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-national perspective applied in the content analysis is in need of extension and sophistication. Including more countries would provide a better basis for understanding differences and similarities in the coverage. Moreover, inclusion of a number of systemic level factors – such as public opinion about European integration and journalistic culture – as independent variables in a model trying to understand the visibility and framing of political events would be welcomed.

Second, our study relies on a homogenous convenience sample. While this may not necessarily render the results from the investigation of the audience reactions to valenced news frames less valid, it is important to note that previous research has identified education as an explanatory variable for understanding support for European integration (e. g., Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2002). Hence, future studies need pay attention to a more heterogeneous sample to also assess the influence of variables such as education.

Third, the experimental news stories utilized in this study were previously broadcast stories on national Dutch news programs which on the one hand adds to external validity of the study, since the stories were in fact broadcast and are therefore realistic. Relying on already broadcast television news is in line with previous studies of framing effects (e. g., Iyengar, 1991; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Nelson et al., 1997). Nonetheless it should be acknowledged that – strictly speaking – the internal validity is potentially jeopardized by using existing stories, as these news stories may vary in terms of the framing on the event, but may also contain other, unintended variance (see e. g., Slater (1991) and Reeves and Geiger (1994) for a discussion).

These shortcomings notwithstanding, our study explored one of the features of news frames that appear to characterize, and perhaps even be conditional for, media effects, namely valence. This is an important addition to the current literature as it may explain why some frames, such as for example the conflict frame, may affect information processing but not automatically lead to opinion change whereas more value-laden frames, such as the ones discussed in this study and in studies by Nelson and Oxley (1999), lead to changes in opinion and policy support. The inherent nature of frames may have significant impact on policy support in the realm of politics in a similar fashion as it has been demonstrated in, for example, health communication. Future research needs to further specify the characteristics of frames, the conditions under which

different types of effects are likely to emerge, and the robustness/ longevity of these effects.

Given that public support – either indirectly or directly in the form of referenda – is a prerequisite for successful future European integration, the news media framing of these issues plays an increasingly important role in the this process. As the enlargement of the European Union towards Middle- and Eastern-Europe becomes a central issue for the current EU and future member states, news media is likely to be a key player in influencing public support – or aversion – towards the enlargement.

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Notes

1. We would like to acknowledge that the assessment whether a frame is inherently positive or negative depends largely on the perspective. Here we merely imply that the frame *has* such qualities and acknowledge that there might not be consensus with respect to for whom the information is positive or negative per se.
2. The summit of the European Council was held in Nice in December 2000 under French EU presidency. Ten states (Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Cyprus, and Malta) will become members of the Union in 2004. The Treaty of Nice, proposed at the summit, deals with institutional and structural changes to prepare the EU for an increased number of member states. Eventually, after controversial discussion, present member states agreed upon the new treaty, hereby introducing a new system of distribution of votes in the Council of Ministers, an agreement on the composition of the Commission after enlargement, and a partial ban of the veto right for certain policy issues, all preliminary steps towards an enlargement of the Union.
3. The following news stories were analyzed: 78 from the Dutch newspapers (*de Volkskrant* n = 31; *Telegraaf* n = 47), 74 from German newspapers (*Süddeutsche Zeitung* n = 28; *Bild* n = 46), and 41 from British newspapers (*The Times* n = 29; *The Sun* n = 12). 177 television news stories from Dutch newscasts (*NOS* n = 86; *RTL4* n = 91), 203 from German newscasts (*ARD* n = 106; *RTL* n = 97), and 143 from British newscasts (*BBC* n = 78; *ITV* n = 65) were included.
4. Stories explicitly had to contain the words ‘European Union (EU), European Commission, European Parliament, European Council or European Court of Justice’ in order to be considered relevant.
5. The items identifying the frames were specifically (a) for the *economic consequences* frame: (1) Does the story mention economic, financial, monetary costs or benefits? (2) Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action? (3) Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now and in the future? (4) Are economical costs and benefits portrayed as direct consequences of enlargement procedure? (b) for the *political-institutional consequences* frame: (1) Are EU institutions mentioned with respect to their task within the enlargement procedure? (2) Is the story mainly about institutional or structural

- transformations within the EU? (3) Does the story mention political developments or institutional changes within the EU? (4) Are these political/institutional developments and changes portrayed as direct consequences of the enlargement procedure? and (c) for the *social-cultural consequences* frame: (1) Does the story mention cultural and social changes and development? (2) Does the story mention effects on social or cultural groups? (3) Are possible changes in the composition of social or cultural groups mentioned? (4) Are these social/cultural developments and changes portrayed as direct consequences of the enlargement procedure?
6. Participants first completed a study of computer-mediated group communication which was, topically, unrelated to the current study.
 7. Utilizing original, un-manipulated news stories has inherent methodological problems. Nevertheless, as will be argued below, these stories represent a valid operationalization of the experimental manipulation. Due to the time gap between the original broadcast and the experiment, and because of technical considerations, it was decided not to embed the stories into a complete news broadcast.
 8. One of the aims of the Dutch government was, for example, to gain more influence within the EU by means of increasing voting power in the Council, especially compared to other smaller states like Belgium. The reasoning behind this is the fact that The Netherlands is by population the biggest of the smaller EU countries with six million more inhabitants than Belgium. The Dutch government wished to see this difference represented in more votes for the Netherlands than for Belgium. Eventually, The Netherlands ended up getting one more vote than Belgium, thus effectively failed to increase voting power. Furthermore, the Dutch government (together with other governments) aimed at discarding the veto right of member states for decisions in the Council, as this would make decision making in a growing Union much easier. Eventually, the veto was abandoned for a broad range of policy issues, but the British government succeeded to keep the veto for tax, health, and security.
 9. The story explained the transformations to be made in order to prepare the Union for enlargement. Here, possible conflicts between member states were pointed out, however it was clarified that these differences would have to be overcome anyway. Next the story provided historical information about the EU, with a clear emphasis on the importance of the Union for peace and ever-growing prosperity in Europe. Accordingly, the enlargement of the EU was portrayed as being significant for establishing enduring peace and democracy in the Middle- and Eastern-European countries.
 10. Knowledge was measured by the following questions: (1) What is the number of Commissioners in the EU Commission? (2) What is the name of the current president of the Commission? (3) What is the name of the Dutch commissioner? (4) What area is the Dutch commissioner responsible for? (5) Where is the European Court of Justice located? (6) Which country currently holds the presidency of the EU? (7) How many countries applied for membership in the EU?
 11. Political efficacy was measured by participants' evaluation of following statements on a 7-point-scale, ranging from 'not agree at all' to 'totally agree': (1) Sometimes politics seems so complicated that people like me cannot really follow what is going on. (2) People like me don't have any influence on the policies of the government. (3) I think I am better informed about politics than others. (4) Political parties are only interested in people's votes, not in their opinions. (5) Member of the Dutch parliament try to stay in contact to their voters. (6) There are so many political parties that resemble each other, it does not really matter which one you vote for.

12. Our two control measures (support for the euro and attitudes towards security issues) did not show any between-condition differences, as expected.

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