

REPETITIVE AND COMPETITIVE MEDIA FRAMES AND HOW THEY AFFECT AUDIENCES' TRUST

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Abstract: *Today, due to the dynamic media context, there is a high probability that people expose to different types of media frames over time. Thus, the present study starts from two suppositions: firstly, individuals tend to be exposed to a variety of information flows, including one-sided or two-sided information flows and secondly, the exposure to different frames might cause different effects. More specifically, these flows refer to either repetitive (one-sided information frames) or competitive coverage (two-sided information frames). Therefore, this study aims at comparing the effects of repetitive versus competitive frames on audiences' trust in political figures, as well as determining the duration of framing effects. The research methodology used for the present study is based on a framing experiment (N=769), since this study empirically follows the dynamic nature of framing effects and their duration. Therefore, to investigate the effects of repetitive and competitive media frames over time, we conducted a survey experiment with three measurement points: T1 – immediate after exposure, T2 – one week after exposure and T3 – one month after exposure. As a stimulus material, we chose the issue regarding the present economic situation in Romania because studies show that topics linked to economic consequences tend to be more socially relevant to people in general. Findings show that there are some differences between the groups of participants assigned to the repetitive scenario as compared to those assigned to the competitive one. When analysing the duration of framing effects, we found grounds to argue that framing effects are more powerful after one month, if compared with one week.*

Keywords: *framing effects, repetitive frames, competitive frames, duration of effects*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the last ten years, research in the field of media effects has been gaining more and more ground among researchers. More specifically, recent news framing research is exploring if and how media continue to play a role in influencing people's attitudes, behaviours and opinions (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2013). Thus, this study aims at determining if media still influence audiences' attitudes in such a consistent way as to be considered an important entity in people's lives.

Given this context, this study starts from the idea that the real-life impact of media frames on attitudes, behaviours and opinions could not be investigated apart from creating a dynamic media scenario. It includes two possible types of media exposure: exposure to the same frame (repetitive framing) as well as exposure to different frames (competitive framing). Moreover, in line with recent research developments, we included tests of duration of framing effects (Lecheler & de Vreese,

2011, 2013). The reason why we chose to create a scenario including both one-sided and two-sided information flows (Zaller, 1992) as well as exposures after certain moments in time is that we wanted to come closer to what happens in real life.

As studies show, a lot of framing research designs are based on a microscopic view of the influence that news frames exert on audiences' attitudes (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:149). This microscopic view refers to the fact that these research studies focus mainly on the influence of one frame at a time (i.e., Nelson, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). Building on this empirical finding, which reveals that there is a framing effect mechanism, research should go further in order to investigate how framing effects function in a setting that is similar to the dynamics of a daily media use. Thus, from now on, framing research designs should consider that it is not enough to evaluate the significant impact of framing effects on people's attitudes apart from the entire flow of communication – they should emphasize the role of framing effects on audience's attitudes and behaviours within this flow.

Our study is based on a combination of both classical and recent theoretical discoveries in the field of framing effects. This combination allowed us to build a strong theoretical framework that describes the variability of people's attitudes as a result of how media framed an issue. Moreover, recent discoveries on the duration of framing effects allowed us to reconsider these classical theories as starting points for a research design that is more firmly set into reality.

The power of framing effects on people's attitudes and behaviour has been consistently investigated and there are results that show visible effects evoked by a single media frame even a full two weeks after exposure (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011, 2013). These results are in favour of the idea that framing effects have real-life applicability (Tewksbury, Jones, Peske, Raymond, & Vig, 2000) or, in other words, that media frames can still have a role in influencing people's attitudes. On the other hand, these results question whether framing effects are similar or different in a dynamic context, as it is the case of today's media context. That is why our study wants to advance a more complex research design, including multiple frame exposures (some repetitive, others competitive) as well as the duration of effects across time (one week versus one month after the first exposure). By doing so, our goal is to come closer to a dynamic media use scenario and also to move further in the direction of a realistic approach towards news framing effects (see also Chong & Druckman, 2008; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013).

In the present study, we test the magnitude of a framing effect immediately and at two delayed time points. In addition, we analyse the effects of either a repetitive or a competitive re-exposure. It is our purpose to advance the idea that framing research could not be done systematically without considering the implications of a dynamic media scenario – not only in terms of frames, but also in terms of framing effects duration.

2. REPETITIVE AND COMPETITIVE FRAMING EFFECTS

The literature regarding framing effects has been consistently augmented since more and more researchers seem to be interested by the fundamental theoretical framework on which framing effects function (Chong & Druckman, 2007c; Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1990, 1991; Scheufele, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Zhou & Moy, 2007). As studies suggest, analysing

framing effects is an interesting research field, since it might serve the researcher as a tool to explain why some "changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce changes of opinion" (Chong & Druckman, 2007c:104). Media frames can be defined as specific mirrors through which reality can be perceived. Moreover, as framing scholars pointed, frames have a selective function and may offer suggestions about certain attributes, judgments or decisions (Scheufele, 2000).

Framing scholars have successfully suggested how media frames influence the way in which audiences make sense of issues in general. In particular, researchers focused on showing if and how news frames are able to modify audiences' opinions, attitudes, and behaviours with regard to a specific topic. However, the discovery of a framing effect mechanism that might be working is not enough and the next step would be to evaluate the implications of such an effect in a realistic setting (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:149). This setting that comes closer to the dynamics of the daily media use includes a fluent flow of communication, in which both conflict and consensus are high on the media agenda.

In real-life scenarios people might be exposed to different news frames at different times. This discovery can be explained with the help of some findings suggested by Zaller (1992) in persuasion research studies. The author found interesting implications of repeated, as compared to competing types of information and he developed a model that explains the role of different types of media content on opinion formation. His main discovery was that media might have a substantial effect on modifying people's opinion only when the information they presented was repeated and consistent (one-sided information). On the other hand, when media present conflicting information, their potential impact on people's opinion is limited or absent. Thus, starting from these discoveries and applying them to framing research, media frames flows are likely to involve both the repetition and the competition among messages as time passes. Since they are different, the results and implications of these two types of frames are likely to vary. One possible explanation of this variance could be based on the framing literature, which offers some hints about the psychological mechanisms behind these different effects (Brewer, 2006; Hansen, 2007; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013; Lee, McLeod, & Shah, 2008).

Zaller's work on how different media content can generate different effects on opinion is not

singular. For example, Peter (2004:145) studies the effects produced by the news frames that are consistent to people's pre-existing considerations (consonant coverage) in comparison with the effects produced by news frames that are opposed to what people already think and know (dissonant coverage). His expectation is that it is more probable that consonant coverage generates a more significant effect than dissonant one. Also, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) suggest that media frames that contain information people already expect are more likely to produce effects, as compared to those frames that are in contradiction to people's expectation and knowledge. Thus, in line with these theoretical insights, our study focuses on the idea that framing effects may be different due to different types of exposure: repetitive or competitive.

Some framing scholars have mentioned that repetitive exposures might exert stronger effects on people's opinions attitudes, and behaviours as compared to one frame exposures (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Iyengar, 1991; Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999). The emergence of stronger effects is motivated by the fact that the repetition of a message is one of the main factors that determines strong and stable attitude changes (Holland, Verplanken, & Knippenberg, 2003). Another explanation for strong effects determined by repetitive frames is based on the approach developed by Price and Tewksbury (1997:199). The authors suggest that the impact of a frame is generally influenced by the effects of accessibility and applicability. To be more specific, accessibility refers to the extent to which individuals can bring certain considerations back to memory; applicability means the extent to which individuals are able to create cognitive bridges between what they already know and what media present. This explains why repetitive frames can be more powerful than other types of frames because they are able to cause higher levels of accessibility. Then, once a consideration is repeatedly activated, the probability that it is in accordance with other pre-existing considerations is also high. Thus, if a framing effect has taken place, repetition of that specific frame generates a high level of accessibility, which, in turn, determines a stronger connection between the new and old information (see also Matthes, 2007). In other words, repetitive exposure guarantees a strong influence of a frame, both on a short-term and on a long-term basis (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:149).

The majority of existing studies are in favour of the idea that repetitive framing effects are strong and that they could be explained through the impact of accessibility and applicability. Iyengar (1991) suggested that at least in domains with which people do not have direct connections, they tend to rely on media and, more specifically, on the information that media chose for them. Besides accessibility, it is important to mention that stronger effects generated by the repetition of media frames firstly depend on how applicable a specific frame is to the individual (Baden, 2009).

It is not surprising that competitive news framing has attracted the attention of a number of scholars (Chong & Druckman, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Druckman & Bolsen, 2009). It is probably because the study of dispute itself fascinates researchers in communication (see also Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). Studies about competitive exposure refer to exposure to at least two competing messages, which are expected to cause different effects. Sniderman and Theriault (2004) added one extra condition in their study design – they wanted to evaluate the impact of competing media messages present at the same time. Their main discovery is that competitive exposure functions as a factor that drives individuals to reconsider their own ideas, which leads to minimal framing effects.

The approach of Sniderman and Theriault (2004) is not unique. Thus, their main idea that exposure to competitive messages may have a minimal framing effect is also explained by other researchers, mainly in connection with the rules of motivated reasoning. For example, Chong and Druckman (2007b:640) make a distinction between strong and weak frames and suggest that the alternative presence of these competing frames is what leads individuals to weigh the advantages of alternative interpretations. Strong frames are built on the principles of accessibility and applicability – they can be easily activated and they are in line with individuals' pre-existing considerations; weak frames cannot be so easily brought back into memory, mainly because they are less applicable. In this context, weak frames might be rejected and only strong frames would have a more powerful effect. In other words, as the authors suggest, competitive framing effects depend on the strength of the frame (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:150).

According to the framing literature discussed above, we can conclude that both theoretical and empirical research has explored the impact of repetitive and competitive exposure on individuals'

opinions, attitudes, or behaviours. The main ideas of these research studies are:

1. Repetitive exposure may generate strong framing effects

2. Competitive exposure may lead individuals reconsider their own beliefs/considerations, which means minimal or no framing effects.

However, these two important ideas refer to a single exposure and, implicitly, to a single experimental setting, in which the magnitude of a framing effect is tested only immediately after exposure. We think that only by considering the impact of time on framing effects could we make strong and valuable conclusions. Thus, the next section of the paper is dedicated to a discussion on the power of framing effects over time.

3. THE POWER OF FRAMING EFFECTS OVER TIME

Research studies from the last ten years show an increasing interest regarding the impact of time on the magnitude of framing effects (de Vreese, 2004; Druckman & Nelson, 2003). Yet, studies that investigate the duration of powerful framing effects by exposing participants to multiple news frames, either repetitive or competitive in nature, are very rare. Also, there is little reference to the role played by the length of the period between two successive media exposures. Moreover, there seems to be two different approaches to time duration of framing: one that suggest that framing effects run quickly (i.e., de Vreese, 2004; Druckman & Nelson, 2003) and the other one that argue in favour of persistent framing effects (i.e., Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011; Tewksbury *et al.*, 2000).

For instance, de Vreese (2004) suggests that framing effects are fleeting and that a period of two weeks after the exposure leads to a total absence of effects. On the other hand, Tewksbury *et al.* (2000) suggest that framing effects are visible even after three weeks after exposure. Yet, as Lecheler and de Vreese (2013) noted, none of these studies point out why and when a framing effect exerts such an impact on individuals' attitudes as to be considered lasting or transitory.

3.1 Repetitive frames. Effects over time. In line with the literature discussed above, we argue in favour of the idea that repetitive exposures may function as a multiplier of effects over time. It is important to note that the power of repetition over time depends on the applicability of the frame to the individual and on the rate of accessibility,

which is how much media information people activate when exposed to a similar frame. According to Feldman and Lynch (1988), the rate of accessibility varies according to the period that passed since the last activation and according to the familiarity of the individual with the repeated message. Thus, starting from the assumption that, at least on political and economic topics, previous exposures are likely to be limited, we can assume that, if the period between two exposures is longer, the accumulative effect of repetition is weaker. In other words, repetitive exposures lead to strong effects, but they depend on the time that passes between two successive exposures. Stronger effects are more visible when the period between two exposures is shorter.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a): If an individual is repeatedly exposed to the same news frame over time, initial framing effects get stronger. (Accumulation hypothesis)

Hypothesis 1b (H1b): The shorter the interim period between two exposures, the stronger the accumulation effect.

3.2 Competitive frames. Effects over time.

Framing research studies on the effects of competitive exposures on individuals' attitudes show that competitive messages stimulate individuals to reconsider their own values and beliefs, thus framing effects are minimal. In other words, competing messages lead to diminishing applicability effects and only highly applicable news frames can produce significant effects in competitive settings (Chong & Druckman, 2007b). Also, Chong and Druckman (2008) suggest a first approach in framing research that considers both the competitive exposure and the temporal dimension. Based on some findings in psychology, the authors point out that the first (primacy effect) and the last (recency effect) things from a list are more likely to be activated, as compared to the things placed in the middle. Neighbouring disciplines, such as persuasion, confirm the dominance of recency effects in communication, which means that the latest media exposure exerts strong influence on attitudes and behaviour (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:152). Thus, taking into consideration the recency effects and the idea that accessibility diminishes as time passes, we assume that competitive exposures function in the sense that the most recent frame is the strongest, also depending on the time that passes between two successive exposures. Stronger effects are more visible when the period between two exposures is longer.

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): If an individual is exposed to competing news frames over time, the most recent frame will have the strongest influence. (Recency hypothesis)

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): The longer the interim period between two exposures, the stronger the most recent frame effect.

4. POLITICAL TRUST

Research indicates that mass media still represent the main means of information nowadays. Moreover, mainly on issues that are more distant, sometimes, media offer their audiences the first contact with what reality is about. For example, research shows that media provide the bulk of politically relevant information and often serve as young voters' first contact with politics (Fu, Mou, Miller, & Jalette, 2011:45). Thus, we assume that different types of media coverage (repetitive versus competitive) and the time that passes between two exposures cause different levels of political trust.

Researchers have argued that media can have a significant influence on political attitudes (Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheaffer, 2008; McQuail, 1979; Newton, 1999; Stroud, 2008), which may explain other subtle influences that serve as driving forces behind attitude formation and change in general. In this vein, one political attitude that merits our attention is political trust. It is often referred in the literature as either political trust or political cynicism, both concepts describing the same variable (Fu et al., 2011:46). Political trust reveals a feeling of confidence in politics, politicians and governmental institutions by the public, whereas political cynicism reveals a feeling of distrust in these political entities (Strama, 1998). People who trust politics and politicians believe that the political systems, the politicians and the government deserve public respect and attention, they are honest and trustworthy. The two main dimensions of political trust seem to be politicians' reliability and competence (Adriaansen, van Praag, & de Vreese, 2010:435). Thus, a high degree of trust in political system means a higher motivation to participate in public activities; a low degree of trust leads to a gap between citizens and the political system, which means disengagement and distance from political processes (Pinkleton & Austin, 2004). Ultimately, a consistently low degree of political trust negatively influences the whole social structure in a country.

Since cynicism has been attributed by some scholars to negative media coverage (i.e., Adriaansen et al., 2010; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997) we assume that an increase in the degree of political trust could also be attributed to positive media coverage. Thus, in our research design, we assume that positive messages could result in a higher level of political trust, as compared to negative messages. As time passes, we assume that repetitive positive exposure might cause an increase of political trust, whereas repetitive negative exposure might cause a significant decrease. Moreover, we also expect that the latest frame would have the strongest impact on political trust: if the latest frame is positive, then the level of trust will be higher; on the other hand, if the latest frame is negative, then the level of trust will be lower.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): If an individual is exposed to a positive message, the level of political trust will increase. Similarly, if an individual is exposed to a negative message, the level of political trust will decrease.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): If an individual is exposed to repeated positive messages, the level of political trust will increase. Similarly, if an individual is exposed to repeated negative messages, the level of political trust will decrease.

Hypothesis 3c (H3c): If an individual is exposed to competitive messages, the latest positive frame will increase the level of political trust. Similarly, if an individual is exposed to competitive messages, the latest negative frame will decrease the level of political trust.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research objective and questions

Our research has two main objectives: The first objective is to investigate the immediate effects generated by media exposure and the second one is to analyse the significant duration of framing effects. Thus, the research questions that guided our research are:

RQ1: How does a positive news frame influence the level of political trust?

RQ2: How does a negative news frame influence the level of political trust?

RQ3: How do repetitive exposures influence the level of political trust?

RQ4: How do a competitive exposures influence the level of political trust?

RQ5: How visible are framing effects on political trust over time?

5.2 Method. In order to analyse the effects of repetitive and competitive exposures over time, we conducted a survey experiment with three measurement points among young people, namely Romanian students. As a stimulus material, we chose the issue of the present economic situation in Romania. More specifically, we tested the impact of both positive and negative coverage of the present economic situation on people's political attitudes, namely on political trust. The choice for the economic situation in Romania is motivated by the idea that economic and political topics in general are expected to attract people's attention. Moreover, the importance that people attach to this kind of topics seems to be higher as compared to other topics.

Our study replicates a more complex study developed by Lecheler and de Vreese (2013). Thus, following some lines from this research study, we first established whether a news frame had a significant immediate effect on the dependent variable – political trust. Second, we allocated our sample into subgroups and traced the effects of both repetitive and competitive framing across two delayed measurement points.

5.3 General design. Initially, we randomly assigned participants to one of two conditions, which represented two alternative versions of a popular generic news frame, the “economic consequences” frame (see also Schuck & de Vreese, 2006; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). More specifically, one frame pointed out that the economic situation in Romania is good (positive frame) and the other one pointed out that the economic situation in Romania is bad (negative frame). The use of alternative versions of the economic frame has two main advantages: it enables us to create a scenario where both repetitive and competitive frames work and it ensures commensurability of the effects across conditions (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:154). The external validity in our study is high, since both the positive and the negative economic frames are present in real media coverage in Romania today.

Our design also required participants to be assigned to a frame exposure scenario: repetitive exposure, competitive exposure or single/no re-exposure. The participants in the single/no re-exposure group were used as a control group; they received only one frame at T1. In order to create a clean experimental design, each participant was tested at a maximum of two points in time. This means that, after being tested immediately after a first exposure (T1), all the participants were split

up in time groups and each participant was assigned to only one additional delayed measurement point: after one week (T2) or after one month (T3). This procedure left us with an overall of 7 experimental conditions (see the Appendix). We made sure that each delayed time group contained a comparable number of participants for each condition. During the delayed measurement points, participants were interviewed on the basis of the same measures that were used in the immediate measurement test.

5.4 Interim period. The interim period we refer to is the period between two successive exposures. In order to create clean experimental conditions, we asked participants how much attention they had paid to news about the economic situation in Romania during the interim period (1 = no attention to 4 = a great deal of attention). This measurement revealed that 77.5% from the participants (N=285) had not paid any or had paid very little attention to this type of news. We also asked participants whether they had discussed the issue with someone else (for example with family or friends) during the interim period (1 = I did not discuss it to 4 = I discussed it quite a number of times). This measurement revealed that 84.2% from the participants had not discussed at all or had hardly discussed the issue. These findings confirm the idea that the absence of the issue from people's personal agenda might be a sign that their related attitudes are fluid and easy to be influenced by media and argue for effects due to the experimental treatment only.

5.5 Sample. The participants in our study were 769 Bachelor and Master Students from the College of Communication and Public Relations, NUPSPA, Bucharest. They were randomly chosen to participate in this study. For T1 they received a printed questionnaire (N=769), whereas for T2 and T3 they received an online questionnaire via Survey Monkey (T2 – N=151; T3 – N=134). The choice for students as participants in our study is motivated by the results from other research studies, which suggest that younger citizens have less stable attitudes than older ones and may not be so politically sophisticated since they have less economic and political experience. We therefore expect that young people's attitudes will be particularly affected by media coverage, either in a positive or in a negative way (Adriaansen et al., 2010; de Vreese & Elenbaas, 2008).

5.6 Procedure. The experimental procedure consisted in three main steps for each participant. Firstly, all participants received a printed

questionnaire at the moment T1, containing one of the two possible alternative economic frames (the economic situation is good or the economic situation is bad). Then, each participant was assigned to a re-exposure group: repetitive/competitive/single exposure. This was done to make sure that no participant would be tested at more than two points in time. At completing the T1 questionnaire, each participant was informed that he or she would be contacted for a follow-up study. Participants did not know that they would be asked the same question again in this follow up. The delayed repetitive or competitive news frame manipulations and the questionnaires were sent to participants after the respective delay: one week or one month. Participants in the single exposure group did not receive an additional news frame. Following the delayed measurement, all participants were debriefed.

5.7 Stimulus material. The stimulus material consisted of one news article per condition at T1 and one additional news article at T2 and T3 for the repetitive and competitive treatment conditions. Each news article contained one version of an economic consequences frame, varied to express either that the present economic situation in Romania is good or bad. Thus, articles varied both in their arguments and in the evaluative direction. Specifically, we manipulated an article about the economic and political issues in Romania, placing attention both to the economic situation itself and to the fact that politicians are responsible for the actual economic setting in which Romania is. Given the design of the study, it was better to use constructed rather than actually published news materials, since the use of real news coverage could have minimized the commensurability across conditions (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:156). We chose this issue because it can be logically presented in terms of economic consequences and we adjusted the news articles as to be in line with the common layout and style of daily Romanian news coverage. We kept the basic core information within each news article identical, while some paragraphs in the story pointed out alternative economic facets of Romania's present situation.

5.8 Measures. Our dependent variable, political trust, was measured with a scale translated and adapted from Adriaansen, van Praag and de Vreese (2010:452). There were seven items on a five-point scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of political trust (T1 – N = 753: M = 3.91, SD = 0.56, Cronbach's α = 0.715; T2 – N =

151: M = 3.84, SD = 0.65, Cronbach's α = 0.831; T3 – N = 134: M = 3.81, SD = 0.58, Cronbach's α = 0.767). For more details, see the Appendix.

6. FINDINGS

6.1. Positive versus negative news frames and their influence on political trust. We expected that if an individual is exposed to a positive news frame his or her level of political trust will be higher. Similarly, we expected that if an individual is exposed to a negative news frame his or her level of political trust will be lower. We used an Independent Sample T Test in order to test the levels of political trust between the groups. Results indicate that there are no significant differences between the levels of trust of the individuals that did not receive any news frame, as compared to those who were exposed either to a positive or to a negative news frame. However, findings show that there are statistically significant differences between the groups of participants exposed to a positive frame, as compared to the one exposed to a negative frame. The exposure to a positive news frame led to a significant increase in the level of political trust, whereas the exposure to a negative frame led to a significant decrease in the level of political trust ($t(303) = -2.095$, $p < .05$). In other words, political trust is significantly correlated with the tone of voice of political news.

6.2. Repetitive news frames and their effects over time. We predicted that repetitive positive frames would lead to an increase in the level of political trust and that this effect would be more visible at T2 (after one week) as compared with T3 (after one month). Following the same line, we also predicted that repetitive negative frames would lead to a decrease in the level of political trust and that this effect would be more visible at T2 (after one week) as compared with T3 (after one month). Results indicate that neither repeated positive messages, nor repeated negative ones have a significant impact on the level of political trust. Thus, the hypothesis 3b cannot be supported.

6.3. Competitive news frames and their effects over time. We predicted that the exposure to a negative news frame, followed by a positive one would lead to an increase in the level of political trust and that this effect would be more visible at T3 (after one month) as compared with T2 (after one week). Following the same line, we also predicted that the exposure to a positive news frame, followed by a negative news frame would lead to a decrease in the level of political trust and

that this effect would be more visible at T3 (after one month) as compared with T2 (after one week). We used an Independent Sample T Test in order to test the levels of political trust between the groups and time settings. Results indicate that the exposure to competitive news frames (negative + positive) leads to a significant increase in the level of political trust in general ($t(136)=-2.060, p<.05$). The same trend is also significant after one month since the first exposure, as predicted. In the case of exposure to competitive news frames (positive + negative), results show that there is a significant decrease in the level of political trust measured at one month after the initial exposure ($t(62)=-1.933, p<.05$). Moreover, results indicate that there is a significant difference between the groups of participants firstly exposed to a negative frame, followed by a positive one, as compared to the participants firstly exposed to a positive frame, followed by a negative one. The latest positive message led to an increase in the level of political trust, as compared to the effects generated by the latest negative message ($t(131)=2.658, p<.01$). The same trend is even more prominent after one month since the first exposure ($t(64)=2.684, p<.01$). Thus, the hypothesis 3c can be supported.

7. DISCUSSION

Our research has successfully shown that news frames affect people's attitudes, namely political trust. As Lecheler and de Vreese (2013:163) suggest, a necessary next step is to analyse the exact role played by these framing effects in the context of real-life scenarios. In our study, we discuss the advantages of testing both the immediate impact of a frame as well as the persistence of framing effects. We also enriched the present study with the analysis on the effects of repetitive versus competitive framing over time.

Our analysis shows that the direction of a news frame can have a significant influence in changing the direction of political trust. More specifically, a positive news frame functions as a factor that motivates individuals in developing higher levels of political trust. On the other hand, negative news frames determine individuals to display a lower level of political trust. One explanation for the increase in the level of political trust after a positive media exposure could be that the distance between people and economic issues is so wide, that people prefer to rely on media information when developing an attitude. Because media present politicians and the government as

important entities responsible for a good economic situation, people tend to follow the trend in the media. Following the same logic, when media blame politicians and the government for the bad economic situation in Romania, people also tend to follow the trend. Results show that negative news frames seem to have a more powerful impact on political trust, in the sense that they could generate a more visible effect.

The fact that a negative exposure has the potential to determine a significant decrease in the level of political trust could also be interpreted in relation to the event. When media present such a sensitive topic, mainly in terms of economic losses, people tend to react to both the event and the way in which it is framed. However, both for our negative and positive exposures, we must note that we also included source credibility as a possible moderator that may explain some changes in framing effects. In this context, although these findings are part of another study, we must assume that higher levels of political trust could be attributed to a positive message from a credible source. Similarly, lower levels of political trust could be attributed to a negative message from a less credible source. Given these results, we think that media may be a significant factor in influencing the direction of people's attitudes – media can either decrease or increase the distance between individuals and public life in general.

In what regards repetitive news framing, our analysis shows that repeated messages have no substantive additional effect on the level of political trust. Repeated news frames do not function in the sense of adding up effects. Media exposure to either positive or negative repeated messages does not increase or decrease the level of political trust; it seems to stay at a more or less comparable level as time passes. Thus, we report a stable effect in cases where repetition took place (see also Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013). Also, our results are in favour of the idea that repeated media exposure may lead to strong, but not necessarily additional media effects (Zaller, 1992). In this context, repetitive frames seem to depend on the framed issue and on how applicable the issue is to individuals. Further research is needed to clarify the connection between sensitive issues (for example, economic issues in a country dominated by a persistent economic crisis) and individuals' pre-existing considerations on them. Our findings enable us to argue that repetitive news framing is not the only key to strong media effects, mainly when the frames are presented one after the other

and not at the same time. Finally, the inclusion of other interim periods between two repetitive frame exposures could have shown important differences. Yet, we recommend that future studies would include more repeated frame re-exposures over time, since we do not know if the initial effect still has an influence after one week or it has already dissipated and individuals are out of media's influence.

Our findings on competitive framing show that alternative messages have a strong impact on political trust. Specifically, the latest positive or negative frame to which individuals were exposed had the strongest influence on the dependent variable. This influence is more visible as the period between two exposures is longer. In other words, the most delayed competitive exposures led to a strong impact that followed the direction of the frame: the latest positive frame determined a strong increase in the level of political trust, whereas the latest negative frame determined a strong decrease in individuals' political trust. These results are in line with Chong and Druckman's research (2008), which showed that, for competitive frames and more specifically for the most recent frame, the passage of time functions as a factor that increases effects. Thus, our findings show that dissonant framing effects are more visible if the delay between two successive exposures is longer. This means that initial framing exposure do play a role in the whole process, since the latest frame is able to cause latent effects. Yet, future research studies must analyse the interaction between the first and second exposure.

Again, we must note that both repetitive and competitive effects depend on a number of individual and contextual variables. Thus, future studies should concentrate on some important moderators that could explain the differences between effects generated by either consonant or dissonant media coverage. For example, the influence of source credibility on news framing, the influence of prior beliefs, the characteristics of the issue at stake or even the power of the news frame itself could play a role in the magnitude of framing effects over time. Moreover, in line with the debate regarding the minimal effects of media (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, 2010; Holbert et al., 2010), the findings in our study prove that we are not entering an era of minimal effects, but we should reconsider the power of the media. As the results from our research show, media can still have a decisive power in influencing people's

attitudes, behaviour and opinion; though, sometimes, effects do not follow our expectations.

Our study has some limits. Firstly, we expected that negatively valence frames to be more effective on political trust in general. More specifically, we expected negative frames to significantly lower the level of political trust, whereas positive frames to slightly increase the level of political trust. This was not the case. A possible explanation of this phenomenon is that individuals that were exposed to a positive frame were surprised by its content, given the overall negative tone on issues regarding the present economic situation in Romania. This surprise could have left participants with such a profound impression of what they had read, while the negative frame involved a rather self-explanatory effect (see also Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013).

Secondly, given the limited number of research studies on the duration of framing effects, we had limited theoretical guidance about how to define the delayed measurement points. Future research studies should start from a similar design and should concentrate on determining the rate of decay of news framing effects. Such studies could trace some explanations about when a framing effect can be called "lasting, transitory or fleeting" (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:165). These studies could also address the idea of the exact "curve of effect decay" (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013:165) for both scenarios – repetitive and competitive.

Thirdly, during our interim period, our participants hardly discussed the issue of the economic situation in Romania. Although this was ideal from a methodological point of view, our design was closer to an artificial setting than originally expected. This leaves us with the question of how quickly framing effects would have dissipated, had we chosen a more debatable issue. Starting from the idea that different issues carry different levels of salience, we expected that young people were particularly interested in economic issues. Our research shows that it was not necessarily the case. Thus, future studies could use our results for a research design that includes issues of varying levels of salience. As Gaines et al. (2007:6) suggested, the durability of framing effects might depend on the issue that is framed.

As pointed in the literature, due to the debates regarding the actual value of framing research, only by considering the dynamic nature of the communication flow and by investigating duration, can we make convincing statements about media's influence on people's opinions, attitudes, and

behaviour. Thus, we urge researchers to address framing effects theories in settings more similar to real life. This includes tests for multiple exposures to different frames, as well as the study of effects over time. We view our research study as a small contribution to a long tradition of future studies addressing framing effects theory in a more realistic setting.

7. APPENDIX

8.1 Experimental conditions

1. Control group (without exposure to a news article)

2. Single exposure group 1 (exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a good one + no re-exposure)

3. Repetitive exposure 1 (exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a good one + exposure to the same news article)

4. Competitive exposure 1 (exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a good one + exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a bad one)

5. Single exposure group 2 (exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a bad one + no re-exposure)

6. Repetitive exposure 2 (exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a bad one + exposure to the same news article)

7. Competitive exposure 2 (exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a bad one + exposure to a news article presenting the economic situation in Romania as a good one)

8.2 Political trust scale. Below are some statements on people's opinion about politicians and political system in Romania. Please indicate for each statement whether you agree or do not agree (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree):

Politicians consciously promise more than they can deliver

Ministers and junior-ministers are primarily self-interested

To become Member of Parliament, friends are more important than abilities

Political parties are only interested in my vote, not in my opinion

Politicians do not understand what matters to society

Politicians are capable of solving important problems

Most politicians are competent people who know what they are doing

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