FRAME-RICH, FRAME-POOR: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTINGENT EFFECTS OF MEDIA FRAME DIVERSITY AND INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES ON AUDIENCE FRAME DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

An audience’s interpretation of news is considered to involve the input of news frames and audience predispositions. This study proposes that media frame diversity and individual-level factors may both condition audience issue cognitions. Using two public issues in Taiwan that vary in news frame diversity and data from a sample survey, this study compares media and audience frames and examines factors that condition audience framing. Results show that media frame diversity corresponds to audience frame diversity at the aggregate level. Audience frames are more diverse in the more diverse news context, but are less diverse in the more uniform news context. Individual differences also affect audience framing. Education appears to be a strong predictor to audience frame diversity as more education increases audience frame diversity in both issue contexts. Other individual variables show differential effects on audience framing across the two issues. Overall, the findings suggest that, while effects of individual-level factors on broadening audience perspectives may vary with issues, diverse media frames may help to cultivate a more reflexive citizenry.

Framing is a seminal concept that describes the interpretative activities on both the message encoding and decoding sides. Researchers have suggested that audience framing is a product of the information integration process that combines input from news discourses and the audience’s existing predispositions (Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Price & Tewksbury, 1997). Empirical studies on
this topic have in general shown that individual-level factors and specific news frames can affect how audience members come to understand news issues (Iyengar, 1991; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Valentino, Beckmann, & Buhr, 2001). But media frames can also be powerful in constraining the available interpretative alternatives for the audience (Tuchman, 1978), and evidence has indicated that media frames can fix the range of audience members’ choices for seeing news events (Huang, 1996a). This suggests that the diversity of media frames may have influence on audience news framing. Given this possibility, research on the role of media frame diversity in audience issue cognitions is limited.

This study intends to examine the effect of this macro-level factor on audience issue framing. Investigating the correspondence between media frame diversity and audience reception also helps to fill up an important area in media research. Although pluralistic mass media have been regarded as the ideal media role pursued in a liberal democracy, and researchers generally agree that assessing the diversity of media content is essential when evaluating media performance in a democracy (McQuail, 1992), it is still not sure if diverse media content indeed has positive impact on the public. Existent relevant literature mostly focused on comparing content homogeneity or diversity across media (Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007; Groshek, 2008), analyzing public agenda diversity over time (McCombs & Zhu, 1995), or searching for individual predictors to public agenda diversity (Allen & Izcaray, 1988). Only a few studies specifically looked into the linkages between media content diversity and audience cognitions (Chaffee & Wilson, 1977; Peter & de Vreese, 2003). The early study by Chaffee and Wilson (1977) has found a greater diversity of media resources, measured by the number of community newspapers, corresponding to a diverse audience agenda-holding about public issues. As media diversity in this study was not content-specific, the authors suggested that both the diversity of media content and the range of opinion on a public agenda should be assessed to examine the media’s function in a democracy.

This study represents such an attempt. It uses framing analysis to address the connection between media content diversity and audience cognitions on public issues. Media content diversity for social issues pertains to coverage of a full range of views (Hoffmann-Riem, 1987, 1992). As framing involves the construction of views in both news production and consumption processes, the concept appears to be a proper analytical tool to examine the relationship between media content diversity and audience issue cognitions.

The purpose and approach of this study also illustrates a way framing research can contribute to media studies. Diverse viewpoints in public discourse indicate that interests of different groups have a greater chance to be considered by the public. This will not only contribute to the fairness of public discourse, the products of which will also be more justified. Although
past research has suggested that media content diversity is a necessary condition for the diversity of audience reception (McQuail, 1992), empirical evidence on this regard is little. If this study finds that more uniform media frames of a public issue corresponds to more uniform audience frames, whereas more diverse media frames corresponds to more diverse audience frames, there will be more grounds to pursue diverse media content for public issues in order to encourage diverse public views in issue discussions. This should help to further understanding of media’s influences on individuals in democratic societies.

Other than media discourses, theoretical and empirical research both suggest that individual differences can condition audience’s frame choice (Iyengar, 1991; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Price & Tewksbury, 1997; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001; Valentino et al., 2001). In order to see if audience framing indeed involves the input of media frames and individual variables, this study will also investigate the contingent effects of individual-level factors on audience frame diversity.

MEDIA FRAME, AUDIENCE FRAME, AND SECOND-LEVEL AGENDA SETTING

Media frames have two functions. For journalists, media frames are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, and are indispensable tools to organize reality for the audience (Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980). When manifested in news texts, media frames are the implicit story lines or the central organizing ideas for making sense of relevant events (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). On the audience side, frames are the mental representations, or schemata of interpretations or perspectives, that result from contact with a news frame (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1991). Schemata refer to cognitive structures of knowledge about certain stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among the attributes (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). People can extract information from news to form schemata, and further use these schemata to process incoming messages (Graber, 1988).

The interaction between media frames and audience frames has been a research focus. Studies have found that specific news frames can affect the topical focus and issue-related evaluations in the audience’s thought-listing responses or issue comments (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997; Valkenburg, Semetko, & de Vreese, 1999; Valentino et al., 2001). It is also suggested that characteristics of media frames can set the limits and parameters for audience members’ interpretive activities (Tuchman, 1978; Huang, 1996a). This function of framing can be comparable to the second-level agenda setting. Both traditional and second-level agenda-setting effects involve the transfer of salience, and the core proposition of these two stages is that elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent on the public agenda.
Yet, traditional agenda setting typically examines the transfer of issue salience, whereas the second level examines the transfer of attribute salience. As to frame is to select and make certain aspects of a perceived reality more salient in a communicating text in order to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies (Entman, 1993), a frame can be considered as a dominant attribute, a central theme or perspective of an object (McCombs, 2005). In this sense, the functions of framing and second-level agenda setting will converge. As elements prominent for a media agenda, the dominant perspectives or frames in the news coverage of an issue thus are likely to become salient among the public (McCombs, 2005).

Such transfer of frame salience can help to explain how characteristics of media frames may set the parameters for audience members to interpret public issues. As diversity of media frames can also be considered as an attribute or a characteristic of a media agenda at the aggregate level, it is likely that diversity of media frames may also correspond to diversity of audience frames within an issue context.

Research in the line of second-level agenda setting, although has not looked into this linkage, has found attributes of news topics play important roles in the audience’s cognitions about public figures and issues (Golan & Wanta, 2001; Hester & Gibson, 2003). For instance, when economic news was framed more as negative, negatively framed news coverage became a significant predictor of consumer expectations about future economy (Hester & Gibson, 2003). This indicates that the transfer of salience between the media and public agenda can operate between the media and public frames. Such function may be expected to go beyond a specific agenda or frame and operate at the agenda or frame diversity level.

MEDIA DIVERSITY AND AUDIENCE DIVERSITY

Research on frame diversity is limited, but a few studies have examined agenda diversity. These studies generally viewed agenda diversity as a diversity of social issues and have used nominal diversity (Allen & Izcaray, 1988; Wanta, King, & McCombs, 1995; Peter & de Vreese, 2003) and thematic diversity (Peter & de Vreese, 2003) to measure agenda diversity. Nominal diversity refers to the number of issues a social unit viewed as important, and thematic diversity refers to the semantic variety of issues a social unit viewed as important.

The agenda diversity studies focused on individual predictors to agenda diversity and most did not examine the correspondence between media agenda diversity and public agenda diversity. The only exception is a cross-national
study examining the relationships at the aggregate level in five Western countries, and the study found a positive relationship between the diversity of television news agenda and public agenda diversity in Denmark (Peter & de Vreese, 2003). Since framing effects can be comparable to second-level agenda setting, this type of agenda diversity study may be viewed as the first-level media content diversity research, and the current frame diversity study may be viewed as the second-level media content diversity research. As a positive relationship between media agenda diversity and public agenda diversity, that is, the first-level transfer of issue salience was found, it is possible that a positive relationship at the second level, that is, the transfer of frame salience may also be found.

A previous study has in effect suggested that the nature of the news context as manifested through frame diversity could be operative in the mechanisms of framing effects. When comparing the media and audience frames of the Hill–Thomas controversy, Huang (1996a) found that the media were powerful in setting the limits for the audience to view the event, although the media and audience frames differed somewhat in rankings and contents. An implication from this study is: if effects of media framing that were possibly confounded could still fix the range of audience frame choice in a more heterogeneous news context or when the media presented more diverse frames as in the case of the Hill–Thomas controversy, it could be expected that audience frames will be more constrained in a more uniform news context or when the media publicize less diverse frames.

As to the different rankings and contents between the media and audience frames in this case, the author conjectured that effects of various frames presented in the heterogeneous news context may be confounded or may cancel each other out when finding way into respondents’ cognitive map (Huang, 1996a). However, there is another way to interpret this. Framing effects basically result from schema activation or modification, and whether an individual’s internal construct is activated is related to the applicability effect of the attributes of a media message (Price & Tewksbury, 1997). When the media provide more diverse frames in an issue context, the audience will have a greater variety to choose personally applicable frames. As audiences are heterogeneous, the frames different individuals find applicable in this more diverse context would tend to be more diverse at the aggregate level. Also because of the available wider selections and individual differences, the audience’s priorities of frames would not necessarily be identical to those of the media. Thus this study will first propose the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Audience frames tend to be more diverse when media frames are more diverse and less diverse when media frames are more uniform.
INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN AUDIENCE FRAMING

Social cognition theories have suggested that audience’s predispositions can invite selectivity in meaning construction process in order to reduce dissonance and tension (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Research further discovered that most individuals, especially those with strong political attitudes, are biased information processors who tend to seek out confirmatory evidence and accept attitudinally congruent arguments (Taber & Lodge, 2006). As differences in social locations or resources can bring different life experiences forming people’s predispositions, individual-level factors such as demographic or resource-related characteristics may affect audience’s news interpretations.

The functions of individual differences in audience frame diversity remain unknown, but research has found demographic and issue-related variables associated with audience framing. Among demographics, gender, age, education, and income have been found to be related to the adoption of certain media frames in different studies (Iyengar 1991; Huang, 1996b; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001), and the effects of these variables on audience framing varied with the types of frames. Partisanship could also insulate the audience from inconsistent cues provided by news frames (Iyengar, 1991), and partisans have shown significant resistance to media frames embedded with an opposite political orientation (Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2001). Moreover, Gamson (1992) used issue interest, frequency in discussion, and whether or not the audience had heard or read about the issue to measure issue engagement and found that engaging audiences were more likely to have prior knowledge of media discourse that subsequently became more accessible for conversational use.

The findings indicate that individual differences in demographic background, issue engagement, and information can affect audience framing, but the effects vary with news frames. Only the effects of partisanship and issue engagement seem less frame-specific. Partisans are less likely to adopt media frames with inconsistent political cues, and issue engagement is positively related to the adoption of media frames. As individual-level factors can condition audience frame choice in specific issue contexts, it is expected that these factors can affect the range of views or, the number of frames audience members employ to see public issues.

Findings from agenda diversity research may also be used as references. Studies have found that individual-level variables have effects on audience agenda diversity. Education showed a positive influence on nominal agenda diversity (Wanta et al., 1995; Peter & de Vreese, 2003) and was positively associated with thematic agenda diversity (Peter & de Vreese, 2003). Higher socioeconomic status was associated with more nominal agenda diversity (Allen & Izcaray, 1988). Females and those with more political interest also tend to have more nominal and thematic agenda diversity (Peter & de Vreese, 2003), but age has mixed results. Age was positively associated with nominal agenda
diversity in the U.S. (Wanta et al., 1995) but negatively associated with nominal agenda diversity in Taiwan and Denmark (Wanta et al., 1995; Peter & de Vreese, 2003).

As this study may be considered as the second-level media content diversity research, if individual differences can condition the number and types of agenda the audience holds in a social context, the selective functions of these individual variables, which could affect the applicability of issue frames, may also be expected to condition the number of different types of frames the audience employs while viewing a public issue. The second set of hypotheses thus includes:

- **H2a**: Females tend to have more audience frame diversity.
- **H2b**: Education has a positive effect on audience frame diversity.
- **H2c**: Income has a positive effect on audience frame diversity.

Partisans tend to have stronger political attitudes and are more resistant to adopt frames with inconsistent political cues. Stronger partisanship may reduce frame diversity.

- **H2d**: Partisanship has a negative effect on audience frame diversity.

As previous studies show inconsistent effects of age on agenda diversity, instead of proposing a hypothesis, this study asks:

- **RQ**: What is the relationship between age and audience frame diversity?

Engaging audiences are more likely to adopt more media frames. Past research also found political interest positively related to political knowledge (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). More informed audience may have more cognitive resources to reflect upon issues and then employ more perspectives to see public issues. Therefore, concern for issue and issue knowledge are both expected to positively predict audience frame diversity.

- **H2e**: Concern for issue has a positive effect on audience frame diversity.
- **H2f**: Issue knowledge has a positive effect on audience frame diversity.

**STUDY DESIGN AND BACKGROUND TO ISSUES**

To investigate the influence of media frame diversity on audience framing, at least two issues are required. Two public issues in Taiwan, where the author’s affiliation is located, were used to examine whether the media coverage for the two differ in the degree of frame diversity. Using content analysis and an audience survey, this study first compared media frames and audience frames for both issues to examine how the media may set parameters for respondents’ frame choice at the aggregate level. It then examined the contingent effects of individual factors on audience issue framing.
The issues under study include the *On Taiwan* controversy and the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute. These two issues were selected because both have received much media attention, and the news contexts for the two issues appear to differ in the degree of frame diversity. The issues became headline news in news media in the years 2000 and 2001, and both have unleashed a storm of controversy in the society of Taiwan. As the media coverage of both issues started to decline by the first half of March 2001, the audience survey was conducted in the middle of March 2001, right after the closure of both issues.

The *On Taiwan* controversy resulted from the content of *On Taiwan*, a comic book with political commentary written by Kobayashi Yoshinori, a Japanese author. The book is about Taiwan’s history, culture, and national identity based on the author’s observations and interviews with Taiwan’s politicians, businessmen, and the general public. The controversy mainly centers on Kobayashi’s accounts of the so-called “comfort women”—military prostitutes—for the Japanese army during World War II. Since the book claims that the Taiwanese ex-comfort women became comfort women voluntarily and were not forced or tricked by the Japanese authorities, many people in Taiwan felt infuriated and some even asked the government to ban the author from visiting Taiwan.

The nuclear power plant issue has been a source of controversy in Taiwan. The Taiwan Power Company proposed the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant project under the KMT (the Kuomintang, or the Nationalist Party) rule in 1980, but the project later became a point of contention between the KMT and the DPP (the Democratic Progressive Party), the two major political parties in Taiwan. The project was first halted by Taiwan’s legislature in 1986, but in 1994 the legislature passed a budget for the project and reconfirmed it in 1996. The plant was then under construction. The issue has been quiet since 1996 until Taiwan’s first political transition in 2000, when the DPP won the presidential election. The DPP cancelled the project and this provoked great conflict with opposition (mostly KMT) legislators who then made up a majority of the legislature.

**METHODS**

**MEDIA SELECTION**

This study uses three major newspapers in Taiwan to analyze the media frames of both issues. The three general-interest dailies, including the *China Times*, the *United Daily News*, and the *Liberty Times*, have adopted in-depth and specialized reporting to remain competitive in market. All three dailies have provided online counterparts which become top online news sites in Taiwan. The three dailies account for two-thirds of the newspaper advertising, and are considered to be representative papers in the society of Taiwan (Government Information Office, ROC, 2003). The media frames publicized
by the three dailies thus can represent the viewpoints of Taiwan’s mainstream media. These dailies are also the top three newspapers the survey respondents in this study most likely read.

**MEDIA COVERAGE**

This study collected news articles on the *On Taiwan* controversy that appeared between December 1, 2000, when the news media took note of the comic book, and March 11, 2001, when the event declined in the three newspapers. News stories and editorials on the controversy printed in the front section (usually 15 pages in total) were all included, apart from letters to the editor. A total of 398 news articles were analyzed, including 158 articles from the *China Times*, 154 articles from the *United Daily News*, and 86 articles from the *Liberty Times*.

The Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute has spanned a longer period of time. This study used September 15, 2000, the day when the DPP government formed a committee to re-evaluate the project, as the starting day, and considered the dispute ended on February 24, 2001, the day anti-nuclear activists demonstrated and called for a referendum on the plant after the administration eventually agreed to resume construction of the plant. The total number of news articles on this issue from three newspapers is 3589, including 1140 from the *China Times*, 1158 from the *United Daily News*, and 1291 from the *Liberty Times*. As the media coverage was heavy, this study used a judgmental sampling technique to sample news articles. This study first selected critical discourse moments during this period. Critical discourse moments are moments that make discourse on an issue especially visible and can stimulate commentary in public forums (Gamson, 1992). The significant events in the process of the dispute identified by newspapers were used as a basis to select critical moments that signaled a more definite move in the development of the issue. A total of 14 days on which the critical events took place were selected. News articles (excluding letters to the editor) on the dispute in the front section of the three newspapers on each following date of these 14 days, where intensive media coverage of the event is expected, were collected. In total, 1210 news articles were analyzed, including 422 articles from the *China Times*, 364 articles from the *United Daily News*, and 424 articles from the *Liberty Times*.

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<td><em>China Times</em></td>
<td>389 (159)</td>
<td>262 (55)</td>
<td>221 (82)</td>
<td>268 (126)</td>
<td>1140 (422)</td>
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<td><em>United Daily</em></td>
<td>428 (142)</td>
<td>204 (40)</td>
<td>253 (92)</td>
<td>273 (90)</td>
<td>1158 (364)</td>
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<td><em>Liberty Times</em></td>
<td>478 (184)</td>
<td>238 (46)</td>
<td>271 (80)</td>
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<td>*Total (Sample)</td>
<td>1295 (495)</td>
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1The number of news articles on the case of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute over time and across publications is as follows:
AUDIENCE DATA

The audience data were collected through telephone interviews conducted by the survey center of the Central News Agency between March 11 and March 13, 2001. The center has developed a computer database that includes prefixes and working residential numbers in Taiwan and allows researchers to reach unlisted numbers through multi-stage, random digit dialing procedures. The sample was drawn from this computer database. The interviews averaged 16.4 minutes and had been authenticated by staff at the center. As this study analyzed news stories in newspapers, only those who regarded newspapers as a major source of news information were selected for the audience survey. Respondents at least 20 years old and has heard of the issues under study were chosen for further interviews. A total of 555 successful telephone interviews were completed, and the response rate was 56 percent. About the sample, 55 percent of the respondents are males, the average age is 38.77, the average educational level is some college, the average annual income is about US$13,440, and about 25 percent are DPP supporters.

Only respondents who expressed opinions toward the On Taiwan controversy and the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute on two open-ended questions were included in the analyses. Overall, 476 respondents gave comments on the On Taiwan controversy and 510 respondents gave comments on the nuclear power plant dispute. This study also excluded respondents who were not frequent readers of any of the three major newspapers. This reduced the sample size to 448 for the On Taiwan case and to 479 for the nuclear power plant case.

Individual-level factors in the audience survey include gender, age, education, income, partisanship, concern for the issues, and issue knowledge (see Appendix A for the measures). Other variables in this study include media and audience frame diversity. Media frame diversity refers to the aggregate semantic variety of frames the news media employ when covering an issue. Audience frame diversity has two measures. At the aggregate level, it refers to the aggregate semantic variety of frames audiences in a society use when commenting on an issue. At the individual level, audience frame diversity is the number of different types of frames respondents use when commenting on an issue (see Appendix B for the descriptive statistics of the individual-level variables). The two open-ended questions were used to assess audience frames of the On Taiwan issue and the nuclear power plant issue, respectively.

DATA ANALYSIS

The media and audience frames were first analyzed. The coding schemes for news coverage of the two issues were established according to the following
steps: the news articles were briefly reviewed at first to get a sense of the media coverage of each case, and then specific sub-events of the On Taiwan controversy and the nuclear power plant dispute were identified. The sub-events refer to critical news events or important topics discussed along with the development of both issues and are viewed as the objects of framing. For each sub-event, a list of frames was set up based on the central organizing ideas found in the news coverage appearing within the period of the sub-event. The coding schemes for audience comments were established through the same procedures.

The central organizing ideas, or the frames, of the sub-events within each news article were identified by information elements such as facts, contexts, attributions, or consequences as well as framing devices, such as metaphors, exemplars, or catchphrases in the news coverage. For example, “Taiwan’s representative to Japan, Lo Fu-chen…requested an official apology and reparations from the Japanese government for the humiliation inflicted on Taiwanese comfort women” was coded as the Human Rights frame. “Opposition Legislators Ask Grand Justices to Rule on Nuclear Plant (headline). Lawmakers from the KMT, People First Party, and New Party collected over 70 petition signatures yesterday to ask the Council of Grand Justices to decide whether the decision to scrap the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant was constitutional” was coded as the Constitutionality frame (see Appendix C for more coding samples). Two sub-events at most were identified in a news article, while for each sub-event, at most two frames were identified. The same procedure was used for the coding of audience comments. Thus, up to four frames could be recorded for each article and each comment.

Two coders were in charge of the coding task. A subsample of 10 percent of the news articles and the audience responses, respectively, for each issue was used to compute inter-coder reliability according to Scott’s pi formula (Scott, 1955). The inter-coder reliability coefficients reached .71 for media frames and .89 for audience frames in the On Taiwan case, and .81 for media frames and .80 for audience frames in the nuclear power plant case.

The $H$ statistic suggested by Chaffee and Wilson (1977) was used to calculate media and audience frame diversity for each issue. Then, linear regression techniques were used to explore factors predicting the respondents’ frame diversity in the two news contexts.

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2 Chaffee and Wilson (1977) used the $H$ statistic developed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) to measure the diversity of perceptions about important issues in a political system. The measurement of $H$ involves a set of categories and the frequency with which responses fall into each category. It is a ratio scale with a true zero and can be calculated from nominal scale data. With these properties, $H$ is considered appropriate to measure the diversity of media frames and audience frames of an issue. The formula for calculating $H$ is $H = -\sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i \log_2 p_i$, where $n$ is the number of categories, and $p_i$ is the probability of occurrence of the $i$th category. The $H$ statistic or entropy increases when there is a greater number of categories and it decreases when observations become concentrated in one or a few categories. If all observations were to fall into a single category, $H$ would be zero. The maximum value of $H$ for $n$ categories is $H_{\text{max}} = \log_2 n$ bits.
RESULTS

COMPARING MEDIA FRAMES

For the *On Taiwan* controversy, eight sub-events in the development of the issue were identified and for these sub-events, 18 types of frames were employed. In total, the frequency of sub-events the news articles covered is 533, and the frequency of frames used in the news articles is 695. Results indicate that these news articles focus on only a few frames. The total column of Table 1 shows that, only the frames of *Historical Truth* (33 percent), *Human Rights* (24.9 percent), *National Identity* (6 percent), *Political Maneuvering* (5.3 percent), and *Policy Decisions* (5.2 percent) each comprises more than 5 percent of the total frames, with the first two accounting for 57.9 percent of the total frames. The three newspapers show similar patterns. Spearman’s *rho* tests show that the correlation coefficients between the frame rankings of any two of the three papers and between each paper and the total news items are all significant (*p* < .01). The two main frames used by each newspaper are also *Historical Truth* and *Human Rights*. In effect, about 76 percent of all news articles on this case use at least one of these two major frames.

The findings indicate that the news coverage on the *On Taiwan* controversy center on two dominant frames, *Historical Truth* and *Human Rights*. The *Historical Truth* frame focuses on whether the content of *On Taiwan* was distorted and on whether the government should investigate the truth. The *Human Rights* frame refers to the issue of justice involved in the controversy such as the rights of the comfort women to find justice and the rights of the author to visit Taiwan.

The other frames, including *National Identity*, which discusses the national identity issue of the Taiwanese, *Political Maneuvering*, which considers the controversy as a political struggle between opposing parties, and *Policy Decisions*, which discusses government decisions on the author’s visit, were all relatively marginalized by the media. As the media do not provide a wide distribution of frames, the news content on this issue appears less diverse.

As to the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute, eight different sub-events and 20 types of frames were identified. The frequency of sub-events the 1210 news articles covered is 1287, and the frequency of frames used in these articles is 1826 in total. The total column of Table 2 shows that, except for the first two frames, *Constitutionality* (24.8 percent) and *Political Intervention* (13.7 percent), the percentages for several other frames are close, with many being around 5 percent of the total frames.

Frames above 5 percent in the dispute include *Constitutionality* (24.8 percent), focusing on whether it was constitutional to halt the project; *Political Intervention* (13.7 percent), referring to the DPP’s intervention in policy change and criticisms of the government’s decision-making on
ideological rather than on professional grounds; Economic Impact (9.4 percent), mainly discussing the impact of policy change on the economy; Procedures of the Recall (6.3 percent), referring to the legal procedures and disputes with regard to the recall of the president; Political Accountability (6.3 percent), discussing government’s responsibility for clear policies; Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Plant (6 percent), discussing the costs and benefits of canceling the project; and Alternative Power Plans (5.3 percent), discussing alternative power plans other than the nuclear power plant.

The frame distributions and rankings of each newspaper show similar patterns as the total news items show. Spearman’s rho tests also show that the correlation coefficients between the frame rankings of any two of the three papers and between each paper and the total news items are all significant ($p < .01$). About 85.4 percent of all news items on the dispute use at least one of the above seven frames. As the media frames in this case are more widely dispersed and the distribution of these frames is relatively multi-modal, the news context of the dispute appears more diverse.

**COMPARING MEDIA FRAMES AND AUDIENCE FRAMES**

The frequency of sub-events in the open-ended responses to the On Taiwan controversy is 509, and the frequency of frames used is 550. Audience responses to this controversy focus only on a few frames. The right column of Table 1 shows that the three major audience frames, including Historical Truth (41.3 percent), Human Rights (19.5 percent), and Overreaction (16 percent),
already make up 76.8 percent of the total frames. The rank order of the first two frames is identical with the two primary frames of the media coverage. In effect, nearly seven out of ten (68.6 percent) who responded use these two frames to view the On Taiwan issue.

As for the nuclear power plant dispute, 484 sub-events and 700 frames at the aggregate level were identified from the 479 respondents. Results show that the percentages of the distribution of these frames are close. As seen from the right column of Table 2, frames accounting for more than 5 percent of the total frames include Safety of the Plant (25.1 percent), Economic Impact (20.1 percent), Domestic Power Supply (10 percent), Disposal of Nuclear Waste (10 percent), Alternative Power Plans (8.1 percent), and Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Plant (7.4 percent).

Compared with the media frames, the audience also employs a variety of frames to view the nuclear power plant issue, but the types and rank order of the audience major frames are different from the primary frames in the media (the top seven media frames). Among the six primary audience frames, the Economic Impact, Cost–Benefit Analysis, and Alternative Power Plans frames are also the primary media frames, but the other primary audience frames, including Safety of the Plant, Domestic Power Supply, and Disposal of Nuclear Waste are not primary media frames. The percentage of respondents adopting any of the primary media frames is 59 percent.
To further examine the correspondence of media frames and audience frames, Spearman’s *rho* tests were conducted for both issues. Results show that for the *On Taiwan* controversy, the rankings of media frames are positively correlated with the rankings of audience frames (*r* = .68, *p* < .01), whereas for the nuclear power plant issue, the rankings between the media frames and audience frames are not significantly correlated (*r* = .41, *p* > .05) (see Tables 1 and 2). This indicates that for the *On Taiwan* case, where the media publicized more uniform frames, the correspondence between media frames and audience frames is higher than that for the nuclear power plant case, where the media publicized more diverse frames.

The *H* statistic was also used to calculate both media and audience frame diversity for the two issues. Table 3 shows that the *H* statistic of media frame diversity for the *On Taiwan* controversy is 3.06 bits and its maximum value 4.17 bits. The *H* statistic of media frame diversity for the nuclear power plant dispute is 3.62 bits and its maximum value 4.32 bits. Theoretically, the *H*-value can vary from 0 to its maximum value, with 0 means that one frame completely dominates the issue and the maximum value means that all frame categories receive an equal share of the total sample (i.e., a completely diverse frame distribution and a rectangular distribution). Thus, the *H*-value increases with a greater number of categories and decreases with observations concentrated in fewer categories. To make the *H* statistic more interpretable and comparable, the observed *H* statistic for each issue was normalized by dividing it by its maximum value for each case, so the standardized *H* ranges from 0 to 1 (McCombs & Zhu, 1995). As the media frame distribution for the nuclear power plant case (*H* = .84) is closer to rectangular than that of the *On Taiwan* case (*H* = .73), the media frames of former are relatively more diverse or less uniform than those of the latter.

The *H*-statistic of audience frame diversity for the *On Taiwan* case is 2.53 bits, and the standardized *H*-value is .71. The level of diversity is close to that of the media frames. In a more uniform news context, as with the *On Taiwan* controversy, the pattern of the audience frames is also more uniform. The *H*-statistic of the audience frame diversity for the nuclear power plant case is 3.19 bits, and the standardized *H*-value is .84, the same as that of the media frames. In a more diverse news context, as with the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute, the audience frames are also more diversified.

The above findings indicate that the diversity of the media frames corresponds to the diversity of the audience frames. In addition, the correspondence between the media and audience frame rankings is lower in the more diverse than in the more uniform news contexts. Thus, H1 stating that audience frames tend to be more diverse when media frames are more diverse and less diverse when media frames are more uniform can be accepted.

However, audience members are able to develop their own frames in both issue contexts, and this may have been even more so in a more diverse news
context. In the *On Taiwan* case, one of the primary audience frames is *Overreaction* (16 percent), but less than 2 percent (1.9 percent) of the media frames is *Overreaction*. This implies that the media may have paid more attention to the controversy than the audience expected. For the nuclear power plant case, while 45.1 percent of the audience frames include *Safety of the Plant*, *Domestic Power Supply*, and *Disposal of Nuclear Waste*, only 9.2 percent of the media frames belong to any of these three frames. This reveals that the audience views the power plant dispute in a very different light from the media. The media focus on problems at the macro level, including the constitutional issue of canceling the plant, the political maneuvering of parties, and the dispute over the presidential recall, which are relatively remote and complicated to the audience. The audience is more concerned with the consequences of policy changes on daily lives. Nuclear safety and power supply are more concrete and relevant problems people would face if the government were to make any policy changes on the plant.

**INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL PREDICTORS TO AUDIENCE FRAME DIVERSITY**

This study used hierarchical regression techniques to examine the effects of individual-level variables on audience frame diversity. Demographic variables including gender, age, education, income, and partisanship were entered as the first block of variables, and issue-related variables the second while the first block was controlled for.

For the *On Taiwan* controversy, the left column of Table 4 shows that age ($B = .14$, $p < .01$) and education ($B = .15$, $p < .01$) both have positive effects on audience frame diversity. The block of demographic variables also significantly explains the variance of the dependent variable (incremental $R^2 = .06$, $p < .01$). When demographic variables were controlled, concern for the issue ($B = .12$, $p < .05$) shows a positively effect on audience frame diversity. The block of issue-related variables also significantly explains the variance of the dependent

### Table 3  Indicators of diversity of media frames and audience frames

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Media frames</th>
<th></th>
<th>Audience frames</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$H$</td>
<td>$H_{max}$</td>
<td>$H$</td>
<td>$H_{max}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>On Taiwan controversy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nuclear power plant dispute</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: $H$ is the calculation of entropy measuring the diversity of frames. $H_{max}$ refers to the maximum value of $H$ for a set of categories.*


variable (incremental $R^2 = .03$, $p < .01$). Older people, those with more education and greater concern about the On Taiwan issue, tend to use more diversified frames to view the case.

For the nuclear power plant dispute, the right column of Table 4 shows that among all individual variables, only education ($B = .13$, $p < .05$) has a positively effect on audience frame diversity. People with more education tend to employ more perspectives to view the nuclear power plant dispute. However, the block of demographic variables does not significantly explain the variance of the dependent variable.

For the second set of hypotheses-testing, the results support H2b and partially support H2e. As more education increases audience frame diversity in both issue contexts, H2b stating that education has a positive effect on audience frame diversity can be accepted. Concern for the issue has a positive effect on audience frame diversity as H2e expected, but only in the On Taiwan context, so H2e can be partially supported too. Gender, income, partisanship and issue knowledge do not show significant effects on audience frame diversity in either context. Thus, H2a, H2c and H2f predicting that females, people with more income and issue knowledge will have more frame diversity cannot be supported, and H2d stating that partisanship has a negative effect on audience frame diversity cannot be supported either. As to the relationship between age and audience frame diversity, results of Table 4 show that age has a positive effect on audience frame diversity, but only in the On Taiwan context.

**DISCUSSION**

The media content analyses indicate that news frame diversity varies with the two issues under study. The media frames of the On Taiwan issue are less
diverse than those of the nuclear power plant issue. Can this macro-level difference condition audience issue framing? The evidence seems to suggest a positive answer. First, the types and priorities of audience frames overlap with the types and priorities of media frames to a greater degree in the more uniform news context than in the more diverse news context, as indicated by Spearman’s rho correlation tests. Second, the values of the $H$ statistic further reveal that the diversity of the media frames generally corresponds to the diversity of the audience frames for each issue. Audience members use more diverse frames in the more diverse news context, but use less diverse frames in the more uniform news context. Finally, a larger proportion of people adopt media frames in the more uniform news context than in the more diverse news context. These findings point to the possibility that the level of media frame diversity may have impact on the range and types of audience frames, and a more uniform news context may have a greater constraining power on audience’s viewpoints.

Results of the nuclear power plant issue offer further implications. Both the media and the audience used a variety of frames to view the issue, but frames that were popular among the public did not match up with the primary media frames. Some of the popular audience frames were marginalized by the media. This seems to suggest that the audience may be more active in a more diverse news context. In a diversified news context, the media provide more stimuli for the audience to cognize an issue. The audience thus has a greater chance to link various stimuli, even if marginalized, with personal experiences or impressions and then develop different emphases when viewing the issue. The nuclear power plant case shows that the audience was concerned about power supply and the safety and waste of nuclear energy, even though these frames were largely overlooked by the media. Perhaps due to reports of nuclear power plant crises in other countries and practical consideration of power stability, the audience found these angles applicable for viewing this dispute.

As to the *On Taiwan* case, the concentration of news coverage on only two frames seems conducive to the audience’s more uniform issue interpretations. The only exception is the *Overreaction* frame, a popular audience frame rarely used by the media, but this frame is more related to the audience’s evaluation of media performance and societal reactions to the issue than to the audience’s interpretations of the issue itself.

The findings also suggest that, although the function of framing is comparable to second-level agenda setting, transfer of frame salience from media content to audience cognitions may not be viewed as transfer of a type of attribute only, as the process may involve a subtler mechanism related to the applicability effect of media frames. As stated by Price and Tewksbury (1997), whether the audience finds a media frame applicable would affect later
use of the frame for relevant evaluations. When the media offer a variety of frames, audience members have more selections to find personally applicable frames to interpret an issue, thus creating their own priorities of perspectives different from the media, as shown by the nuclear power plant case. On the other hand, when the media concentrate on few frames, the audience has limited choices to find applicable frames, and this may make the dominant frames more accessible and then applicable for the audience to construct an issue, as the case of the On Taiwan controversy shows.

Note that the correspondence between media frame and audience frame diversity should not be viewed as being unique in Taiwan’s social context. Although past research did not specifically examine the relationship between media and audience frame diversity, a few studies have offered some comparable findings. Huang’s (1996a) study on the heterogeneous news context of the Hill–Thomas controversy showed that, although the media and the audience shared some frames, audience members held a few non-media frames. She suggested that media frames did find way into the audience frames, but in the process of assimilation, certain components of the media frames might have been enriched, transformed, or substituted, due to the stimulation from the interaction between media frames and the audience’s experiential knowledge. The findings of the nuclear power plant case in this study resonate with her results. On the other hand, Gamson’s study (1992) presents the case with a more homogeneous news context. He found that media discourse on the affirmative action issue concentrated only on two frames, Remedial Action and No Preferential Treatment, and that the aggregate audience discourse also resonated with the two dominant media frames. This suggests that the first finding of this study has certain degree of generalizability that is substantiated by previous research conducted in the West.

Another finding worth noting is that the three mainstream dailies show similar patterns in the distribution of frames while covering each issue. The frame rankings of the three papers are highly correlated with each other for each issue. This suggests that the high degree of cross-media homogenization found at the story or agenda level in previous studies (Journalism.org, 2006; Boczkowski & de Santos, 2007) may take place at the frame level when the mainstream media cover the same issue.

Other results from the regression analyses indicate that individual-level factors have differential effects on audience frame diversity in the two issue contexts. Education is a positive and only predictor to audience frame diversity in both cases. Education has been used as an alternative measure of political awareness, and more educated people may develop more abstract learning skills to comprehend political ideas (Zaller, 1992). Education can also increase the number of issues citizens view as politically relevant and the
number of connections people make between their lives and social events (Popkin, 1991). Equipped with more learning skills and resources, more educated people are more likely to consider different aspects a controversial issue involves.

Age and issue concern have positive effects on audience frame diversity for the On Taiwan issue only. The issue involved aspects such as historical truth, human dignity, and freedom of speech. Older people may have more historical sense and experiences to link with these different aspects, thus employing more perspectives to view the controversy. Individuals with more concern about the issue may try to learn different sides of the story and think more thoroughly when asked to give comments. However, age and issue concern do not predict audience frame diversity for the nuclear power plant case. The only predictor to audience frame diversity for this case is education. The level of abstractness and complexity of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant dispute may require more cognitive skills to process and comprehend its multi-faceted information and arguments. This may increase the weight of education in enhancing the audience’s pluralistic interpretations of the dispute. As education is the only individual variable significantly predicting audience frame diversity, this explains why individual-level variables only account for 3 percent of the variance of the dependent variable in this case. Other variables such as information processing skills or a more comprehensive measure of concern for different aspects of the issue may need to be included in the model to increase the predicting strength of individual-level variables to audience frame diversity.

CONCLUSION

The comparisons of media frames and audience frames of the two issues at the aggregate level suggest that a multiplicity of media frames on a social issue seems to be conducive to cultivating a more reflexive citizenry. When the news media provide more diverse perspectives on an issue, the audience has a larger degree of latitude to decide which perspective is applicable, and in a more stimulating issue context, such as that of the nuclear power plant dispute, audience members may become more likely to actively construct personally meaningful views about the issue. The alternative thinking by different individuals could contribute to the dynamics and inclusiveness of public discourse and if effectively considered, could help to produce more comprehensive solutions for controversial public issues.

The findings of this study further provide new insights into possible factors shaping audience issue cognitions. Both of the macro-level media frame diversity and individual-level factors may be operative in the process of audience’s issue construction. While media frame diversity corresponds to
audience frame diversity at the aggregate level, the predispositions of audience members can affect the number of frames the audience employs at the individual level. Demographic background, education in particular, and concern for the issue can play important roles in audience framing, although the conditioning effects of the individual variables may vary across issue contexts.

The data of this study were collected in early 2001, and Taiwan has completed a second transition of power since the KMT won the presidential election in 2008. Can results of this study be applicable today or in the future? The second peaceful political transition suggests that democracy has taken roots in Taiwan and a more pluralistic society has emerged. Audience members may become even more active in selecting personally applicable frames, and as a more diverse media frame context provides greater choices for constructing individually meaningful interpretations of an issue, it could be expected that audience frames would still be more diversified in this context. Moreover, the impact of education on learning skills would probably still make it a strong predictor to audience frame diversity, but the effects of other individual variables would depend on the nature of the issue as revealed from this study.

This study also introduces the concept frame diversity, and has treated it as a discrete variable at the aggregate level (i.e., media and audience frame diversity) and a continuous variable at the individual level (i.e., audience frame diversity). The concept is considered viable as it taps into the ideal of pluralistic views for social issues in a democracy and offers a new way to examine the linkages between news media discourses and audience cognitions. This study does not differentiate nominal and thematic frame diversity as some agenda diversity research did, because at the individual level, audience frame diversity refers to both nominal and thematic frame diversity at the same time. However, future studies on frame diversity may examine the nature of frames of an issue and then perhaps propose dimensions tapping into the different areas of concerns of the frames to further examine the correspondence between the media and public discourses. Future studies may also consider using panel study designs to analyze changes of media and audience frames over time and investigate the linkages between the two to further establish the causality between media and audience frames.

APPENDIX A

MEASURES OF AUDIENCE VARIABLES

Gender. Male was coded as 0 and female as 1.

Age. Respondents provided birth year for calculation.
**Education.** Respondents were asked to report their highest educational level (1 = Primary school and below, 2 = Junior high school, 3 = Senior high school, 4 = College for professional training, 5 = University, 6 = Master level, 7 = Doctoral level).

**Income.** Respondents were asked to estimate their annual income in NT $50,000 (US$1,471) increments, ranging from under NT$200,000 (US$5,882) to more than NT$1,010,000 (US$29,706).

**Partisanship.** Respondents were asked: “In our society, most people have their stance toward politics. Generally speaking, which platform is closer to yours?” Responses include the Nationalist Party, the Democratic Progressive Party, the People First Party, the New Party, Others, and Independent. Those who chose a specific party were recoded as 1, and independents coded as 0.

**Concern for the Issue.** This variable measures the degree of concern the respondents had for the two issues, respectively. Answers were recorded on a 10-point scale where 1 means no concern at all and 10 means a great deal of concern.

**Issue Knowledge.** Respondents were asked to answer four knowledge questions about the two issues, respectively. A correct answer for an item obtains one point, so the maximum point for the measure is four. The reliability $\alpha$ of the scale is .67 for the On Taiwan controversy and .55 for the power plant dispute. Reliability tends to be relatively lower when fewer items are used to measure a scale.

### APPENDIX B

**Table B1 Descriptive statistics of audience variables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>On Taiwan (n = 448)</th>
<th></th>
<th>Nuclear Power Plant (n = 479)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>38.77</td>
<td>12.82</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>38.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3.61</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>5.98</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>6.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship (partisan = 1)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue concern</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>7.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue knowledge</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>-0.53</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience frame diversity</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: CODING SAMPLES OF PRIMARY MEDIA FRAMES

A. CODING SAMPLES OF THE ON TAIWAN CONTROVERSY

1. “Historical Truth” Frame

*China Times* February 27, 2001

Of 48, Only Three Knew They Would Work as Comfort Women

Taipei—Kobayashi Yoshinori said in *On Taiwan* that all comfort women were volunteers, but according to *Case Studies of Taiwanese Comfort Women*, a report made by Taipei Women’s Rescue Foundation, of the 48 former comfort women, only three knew they would have to provide sex services for Japanese soldiers when recruited by the Japanese army.

2. “Human Rights” Frame

*United Daily News* February 28, 2001

Lo Fu-chen Expresses Concern over the Comfort Women Issue

Tokyo—Taiwan’s representative to Japan, Lo Fu-chen visited the Interchange Association in Japan on February 26 to express serious concern about the comfort women issue on behalf of the Taiwanese government. He requested an official apology and reparations from the Japanese government for the humiliation inflicted on Taiwanese comfort women.

B. CODING SAMPLES OF THE FOURTH NUCLEAR POWER PLANT DISPUTE

1. “Constitutionality” Frame

*Liberty Times* October 31, 2000

Opposition Legislators Ask Grand Justices to Rule on Nuclear Plant

Taipei—Lawmakers from the KMT, People First Party, and New Party collected over 70 petition signatures yesterday to ask the Council of Grand Justices to decide whether the decision to scrap the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant was constitutional. Yang Jen-shau, secretary-general of the Judicial Yuan, received the petition.

KMT Legislator Hsu Shu-po said the legislature passed a budget for the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant project in 1994 and reconfirmed it in 1996. If the Executive Yuan decides to halt the project, a reversal of the policy must be approved by the legislature; otherwise the decision would be unconstitutional.
2. “Political Intervention” Frame
*China Times*  October 4, 2000
KMT and PFP Legislative Caucuses Back Tang Fei and Condemn Lin Hsin-yi
Taipei—Premier Tang Fei’s clear stance on the construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant has exacerbated the dispute. The KMT and PFP (People First Party) legislative caucuses openly backed Tang yesterday, and insisted on the plant’s construction. The KMT caucus contended that the suggestion made by the Ministry of Economic Affairs to stop the construction of the plant was based on political considerations and was illegal.

3. “Economic Impact” Frame
*Liberty Times*  October 30, 2000
National Stabilization Fund Ready to Prevent Devastating Effects on Market
Taipei—The Executive Yuan will face the reaction of Taiwan’s stock market today after last Friday’s cancellation of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant. It will watch today’s market very closely. According to one government official, the National Stabilization Fund is prepared to enter the market whenever it is needed to prevent bearish effects triggered by the nuclear power plant issue.

4. “Procedures of the Recall” Frame
*United Daily News*  October 31, 2000
KMT Calls for Solidarity to Recall the President
Taipei—The dispute over the Executive Yuan’s decision to halt the construction of the Fourth Nuclear Power Plant is snowballing. The KMT’s legislative caucus approved a proposal to recall the president in a caucus meeting yesterday. The party decided to form alliances with other opposition parties to push the recall drive and to break off communications with the legislative caucus of the DPP. The KMT lawmakers were outraged by President Chen Shui-bian’s leadership style and blamed him for causing political instability.

*Note.* Sentences printed in boldface are information elements for identifying the media frames.

REFERENCES


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Education at National Taiwan Normal University. She is interested in how the news
media construct social discourse and the interplay of media discourse and public
cognitions, opinion and deliberation.