



# Conceptualizing viewpoint diversity in news discourse

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## Abstract

Journalistic news coverage plays an essential role for providing an audience with a diverse, multifaceted perspective upon public affairs. However, in the scholarly debate, most measures of viewpoint diversity do not distinguish between statements raising commensurable interpretations, and contributions that construct different meaning in a consequential sense. We provide an operationalization of viewpoint diversity that builds upon a tradition of identifying distinct interpretations through framing analysis. Going beyond frame diversity, we then distinguish between equivalent, complementary and competing, diverse interpretations: we consider as commensurable those frames that derive from the same ‘interpretative repertoire’, a notion borrowed from discourse studies. We propose a strategy for operationalization and the measurement of viewpoint diversity. Our focus on meaningfully different interpretations contributes to advancing research into journalism, political opinion formation, audience elaboration, and other important fields of study.

## Keywords

Discourse, framing, indexing, journalism, news, repertoires, viewpoint diversity

One of the key functions of the press in democratic societies is to inform their audiences about possible perspectives upon current events and contribute to a plurality of views (Porto, 2007). In consequence, traditional mass media and journalism are frequently

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criticized for presenting only a limited range of views; new, participatory media are praised for their potential for increasing this range; and suitable means for safeguarding viewpoint diversity – legislation, economic structures, professional practices, audience participation, and so on – are discussed. At the same time, the focal matter of contention – the diversity of viewpoints – notoriously eludes definition and measurement (Benson, 2009). Specifically, it remains unclear which observed variations in the news meaningfully contribute to viewpoint diversity (Napoli, 1999).

Focusing on the diversity of news *content* (Napoli, 1999), we review available research and theorizing to discuss the concept's normative relevance and operational specification. We argue that most conventional measures fail to distinguish between statements raising commensurable interpretations, and contributions that construct different meaning in a consequential sense (Herman, 1985). Instead, we refer to the notion of *interpretative repertoires* in discourse studies and theory (Wetherell and Potter, 1988). We propose a research strategy based on framing analysis that distinguishes between commensurable and diverse interpretations (Dalton et al., 1998). Conceptualizing how frames refer to generic logics to import general background assumptions, our strategy functions independently from the issue or debate considered and the range of deductively defined 'relevant' cultural worldviews: it enables a comparative assessment of viewpoint diversity.

## **Conceptualizing viewpoint diversity: The reductive nature of public communication**

The public sphere can be modeled as an arena wherein diverse viewpoints are gathered and debated, generating public opinions as orientation for individuals as much as society at large. These debates are covered or sometimes staged by the media, inviting participation and rendering presented viewpoints available for democratic opinion formation (Gerhards and Neidhardt, 1991). The importance of diverse viewpoints for democratic debates is easiest understood through the lens of framing theory: any communicative message selectively emphasizes certain aspects of complex reality, 'framing' it and enabling interpretation (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987; Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007; Van Gorp, 2007). Thereby, frames inevitably deselect many other aspects that could sustain other, equally plausible and relevant frames. Accordingly, the presence of frames advancing *different* interpretations of the same issues is a crucial measure of the quality of a debate: it enables audiences to consider multiple possible meanings of a situation, and adopt those it considers most pertinent (Porto, 2007).

In synthesizing Gamson and Modigliani's (1987), Entman's (1993), and Benford and Snow's (2000) seminal definitions, we understand frames to be issue-specific, selective, coherent contextualizations of a focal object, which are consequential for its appraisal and preferred treatment (Baden, 2010; Baden and Springer, 2014).<sup>1</sup> This view emphasizes three aspects of frames that are central to viewpoint diversity's role in democratic media: first, frames construct coherent meaning based on a selective representation of social reality (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987). If different frames can be constructed, the same reality is endowed with different meaning. Second, the meaning constructed by frames is not neutral, but suggests specific evaluations and courses of action that serve

some purposes better than others (Benford and Snow, 2000; Entman, 1993). Rendering certain ideas ostensibly legitimate while others appear far-fetched, frames are an instrument of discursive political power. If single or few frames prevail while others are suppressed, media audiences are constrained in their right to make free, informed choices among all viable options (Carragee and Roefs, 2004; Druckman, 2004; Graber, 1988; Porto, 2005; Tourangeau and Rasinski, 1988). Third, because they wield discursive power, frames are often strategically constructed to advocate specific political views and agendas (Benford and Snow, 2000; Gerhards and Rucht, 1992): political actors sustain particular frames, which in turn further these actors' interests. Accordingly, in every act of public communication, diverse frames can be legitimately constructed – because complex reality supports variable selections of relevant aspects, and because different frames represent the plural viewpoints of democratic subjects (Chong and Druckman, 2007a; Druckman, 2004; Fisher, 1997).

### **Evaluating viewpoint diversity: Normative and conceptual issues**

While most conceptualizations of democratic debates depend on some notion of viewpoint diversity, they emphasize different aspects, and differ in how much diversity is deemed adequate. Ferree et al. (2002) distinguish four normative standards against which viewpoint diversity can be measured. In a 'representative liberal' model, the range of legitimate viewpoints refers to the views of relevant political *actors* – usually elected political elites – who should be represented in proportion. Omission of viewpoints beyond these is considered unproblematic. In a 'participatory liberal' model, also nonelite actors' views constitute important contributions. Both theories focus on representing democratic interests and consider diversity to be fulfilled if all relevant actors could present their views – even if most actors advance similar frames, or if nobody raises specific aspects of an issue. By contrast, in the 'discursive' model, raised interpretations are validated against one another with the aim of reaching consensus on an 'objective', 'complete' understanding of an issue. The 'constructionist' model, finally, regards the provision of diverse frames as an ends in itself, especially for viewpoints challenging mainstream views. Both models are thus less concerned about the range of speakers, but aim to capture all relevant aspects and plausible interpretations of an object – even if most arguments are exchanged between few, nonrepresentative actors.

Juxtaposing these models' implications for viewpoint diversity, representative democracy raises the lowest demands; participatory models require wide inclusion but de-emphasize full information, while discursive models emphasize full information and care less about inclusion. Constructionist views, finally, require both a wide inclusion of views and a multifaceted representation of the subject matter, and thus are most demanding with regard to viewpoint diversity. These different amounts and qualities of diversity desired complicate researchers' choice when evaluating viewpoint diversity (Herman, 1985; Voakes et al., 1996). Currently, most studies implicitly assume some constructionist-like combination of both 'important' speakers (e.g. powerful elites) and 'alternative' viewpoints to be represented in a debate. However, they generally fail to provide clear criteria defining either desiderate, or a measure of how much is 'enough' diversity (Althaus, 2012).

In our view, speaker-oriented approaches to viewpoint diversity offer little help for deciding whose viewpoints should be represented: they either externalize the problem by privileging positional elites, or implicitly refer to content-based criteria by inviting speakers expected to contribute different interpretations. By contrast, content-oriented views approximate the representation of all relevant aspects of a concern: they provide both measures and criteria for discriminating valuable from redundant contributions. At the same time, it is important to consider that more viewpoint diversity is not always productive. Not all frames are equally well-grounded in validated information (Pennington and Hastie, 1986) or make a valuable difference in understanding (Holcomb et al., 2011). Furthermore, people's ability to process diverse viewpoints is limited (Druckman, 2004), as is the ability of public debates to discuss and aggregate them toward political will formation. Journalists are not only tasked to represent diverse viewpoints, but also to balance the range of viewpoints available in a debate: as 'gatekeepers' or 'gatewatchers' (Bruns, 2005), they need to reduce the overwhelming complexity of all viable interpretations to represent a manageable amount of *relevant* viewpoint diversity (Graber, 1988).

While journalism has some in-built mechanisms that foster the publication of novel, deviant frames, powerful routines in media production limit the diversity of represented frames: on the one hand, the representation of competing policy agendas and the 'novelty' news value lead journalists to occasionally represent viewpoints very different from those already in the media (Bennett, 1996; Curran, 2005; Ferree et al., 2002; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011; Porto, 2005). On the other hand, co-orientation (Danielian and Reese, 1989), the privileged selection of established sources (Althaus et al., 1996) and issues already on the agenda (Galtung and Ruge, 1965), as well as the development of journalistic frames (Scheufele, 2006) support a selection of redundant, oligarchic viewpoints. In this article, we consider the ability to open up different perspectives upon a subject matter as the key evaluative criterion for discriminating relevant from irrelevant viewpoint diversity (Herman, 1985; Holcomb et al., 2011). For each additional viewpoint, we assess its relative distinctiveness to gauge whether its contribution to diversity warrants inclusion in the debate. While normative theories remain essential to determine how much diversity is 'enough', we thus obtain transparent, intersubjective criteria for assessing viewpoint diversity.

## **Assessing viewpoint diversity: Operational and analytical approaches**

How can one determine whether presented views introduce novel perspectives, or are merely variations on a common theme? Most available measures of viewpoint diversity access the diversity of interpretations only indirectly (Voakes et al., 1996): qualitative approaches are strong in arguing how specific contributions to (or omissions from) the debate make a difference (Ryan et al., 1998; Van Zoonen, 1992), focusing on specific marginalized views, or criticizing dominant interpretations (McLeod, 2009). However, while these studies are often instructive about the exclusionary and inclusive mechanisms shaping the public debate, only few, large studies address more than a few selected viewpoints (Goddard et al., 2008). Other studies assess viewpoint diversity using content

analytic methodology (Hayes and Guardino, 2010; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013; Muschert, 2009). However, it is not always transparent how their indicators were chosen and can validly and relatively exhaustively capture the available interpretations (Voakes et al., 1996).

In our review, we have identified seven main approaches to detect viewpoint diversity in the existing literature, which come with different strengths and weaknesses.

Most studies in communications focus on the diversity of sources whose views are represented (Althaus et al., 1996; Benson and Hallin, 2007; Galtung, 2006; Zaller and Chiu, 1996). These studies typically follow Bennett's (1996) indexing hypothesis, and consider viewpoint diversity to be high if a sizeable share of nonofficial or nonelite sources are cited (Ferree et al., 2002; Ryan et al., 1998). However, diverse sources may echo the same few interpretations; likewise, few actors can present a wider or narrower diversity of viewpoints (Ferree et al., 2002; Holcomb et al., 2011; Voakes et al., 1996). While the inclusion of diverse voices legitimizes political discourse (Wessler et al., 2008) and increases the chance that diverse interpretations are provided (Ferree et al., 2002), it is no direct measure of viewpoint diversity.

Instead, the range of speakers is related in complex ways to viewpoint diversity: for instance, competing elites are far more likely to voice diverse views under elite polarization or fragmentation compared to elite consensus (Zaller, 1992). Radical activists provide more different views than activist groups operating within societal mainstream (Ferree, 2003). Differently polarized political cultures, plural cultural backgrounds, and the maturation of the issue under consideration shape the range of diverse viewpoints that exist in a society (Gamson et al., 1992; Motta and Baden, 2013). Journalistic networks and sourcing strategies, media system properties, and political communication cultures determine which of those voices gain access to the media (Bennett, 1990; Benson, 2009; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011). However, to identify whether and when diverse speakers also voice diverse viewpoints, we need measures that directly access the provided interpretations.

Among those approaches focusing on the diversity of news *content*, three related strategies emphasize the tone or political position represented in the news: in the simplest case, viewpoint diversity is considered high if official viewpoints are contrasted against some counterframes (Bennett, 1990; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011; Hayes and Guardino, 2010). However, this measure does not detect whether counterframes provide one or multiple different interpretation(s), or merely deny the official position. It targets the lowest end of the scale, distinguishing any diversity from no diversity at all (e.g. muted dissent, tight elite consensus). A slightly more differentiated variant assesses the diversity of tones attached to political issues (Hayes and Guardino, 2010). However, the same limits apply also to this measure, which primarily distinguishes consensual from contentious discourses. A third approach codes political slant (Ho and Quinn, 2008; Pritchard, 2002). At least in multiparty systems, this approach can distinguish also beyond two interpretations, albeit in rather coarse grain. It is, however, similar to the source-based measure of represented elites, including the associated limitations. All three measures are limited by their assumption that political disagreement equals diverse viewpoints: they ignore the possibility of diverging preferences on identical interpretations, and are unable to identify diverse interpretations supporting similar policy standpoints. Specifically when applied to

two-party systems, their uni-dimensionality neglects that ‘citizens need a broader variety of cues in the news media than those resulting from the traditional routine of “hearing both sides”’ (Porto, 2007: 316).

Three more approaches focus on the descriptions of political issues. One strategy investigates the diversity of language used to describe a political issue. While qualitative, discourse analytic approaches enable valid measurement but remain constrained in scope, quantitative assessments of language use encounter difficulties when deciding whether diverse language also expresses different interpretations (Ho and Quinn, 2008): complex narratives may verbosely express one common interpretation, just as the same expressions can be arranged to construct different accounts (Baden, 2010). Similarly, the same interpretation may be told in abstract as a thematic frame, or instantiated and illustrated in an episodic one – while the narrative format of the frame can be combined with quite dissimilar ideas (Iyengar, 1991). Detected patterns in language use thus provide only an indirect measure of viewpoint diversity. Next, several studies assess the prevalence of specific topics or frames in the news about an issue (Benson and Hallin, 2007; Carpenter, 2010; Goddard et al., 2008; Hayes and Guardino, 2010; Humprecht and Büchel, 2013; Van Gorp, 2005). Despite important differences between those topics associated with an issue and the presentation of issue-specific frames, both strategies are proxies for the presence of diverse foci in news discourse (Chyi and McCombs, 2004; Hayes and Guardino, 2010). Where it is ensured – for example, through a pilot discourse analysis – that coded frames represent meaningfully different interpretations (and coded topics validly indicate distinct frames), this strategy can be suitable to measure viewpoint diversity (Herman, 1985). However, comparison across debates remains difficult, and the quantification stands and falls with the qualitative pilot – which contains the primary assessment of diversity. Deductive frame or topic analyses, by contrast, can merely make assumptions about which coded categories represent commensurable or competing interpretations: especially analyses at the level of wide topic domains (e.g. ‘economy’) typically subsume considerable variability within the interpretations of that domain, and cannot detect commensurable interpretations applied to different topic domains. Recognizing these limitations, finally, some studies categorize interpretations into very wide, non-issue-specific frames (‘master-frames’; Gerhards and Rucht, 1992; Voakes et al., 1996), or consider their different ideological implications (Benson, 2009). While ideological diversity can mean somewhat different things (from fuzzy, very heterogeneous ‘left ideology’ to very specific ‘Maoist ideology’), in some interpretations it comes close to addressing what we mean by diverse interpretations.

## **A measure of viewpoint diversity based on interpretative repertoires**

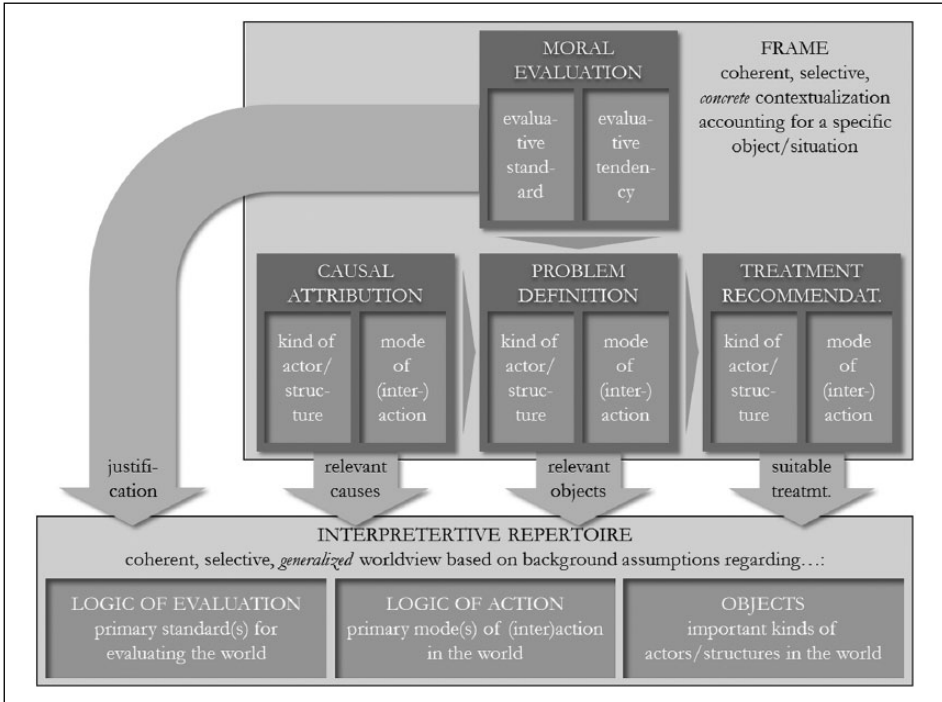
### *Frames, ideologies, and repertoires*

In this article, we consider all frames as diverse that contribute to different *interpretative repertoires* – an idea borrowed from discourse theory. Repertoires are macroscopic semantic structures – coherent ways of interpreting and talking about the world based on a common set of assumptions about its nature (Fairclough, 2003; Wetherell and

Potter, 1988; see also Baden and Springer, 2014; Donati, 1992). They overlap with common 'ideological' ways of political talk (e.g. environmentalist, nationalist, neoliberal 'ideologies'). However, interpretative repertoires are more inclusive than notions of ideology that consider only the 'big', political-philosophical theories: any frame is part of some interpretative repertoire, and hence 'ideological' (Gerhards and Rucht, 1992; Snow and Benford, 2005). At the same time, they are more differentiated than common notions of 'left' or 'right ideology', acknowledging that each camp uses multiple repertoires (Converse, 1990; Donati, 1992). Repertoires are understood as constructed, empirical phenomena – coherent manners of speaking justified by their use, rather than philosophical argument. They constitute large, generalized cultural belief structures, but are defined by their distinctiveness: different repertoires necessarily advance non-commensurable interpretations – and thus contribute to viewpoint diversity. Repertoires can be found empirically, inductively, and thus avoid discretionary researcher judgment about which relevant, deductively defined cultural worldviews should be distinguished. More than the polysemic, politically charged notion of ideology, thus, interpretative repertoires enable a concise operationalization and analysis in actual discourse (Baden and Springer, 2014).

A repertoire's coherence is enabled by (usually implicit, but explicable) background assumptions regarding important objects, actors, interactions, and evaluative standards (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Fairclough, 2003; Wetherell and Potter, 1988). Applying these assumptions, repertoires reduce the complexity of the world to a limited set of actors and objects with known characteristics, expectable actions, and coherent evaluations. Within the same repertoire, different accounts about different objects contribute to one consistent overall interpretation of the world.

Interpretative repertoires relate directly to the use of frames in discourse. While repertoires represent selective, but *generalized* and abstracted worldviews, frames provide selective contextualizations of *concrete*, instantiated objects, actors, or situations. Frames define the nature of a focal object, and highlight relevant causes, suitable treatments, and appropriate evaluations (Entman, 1993). In doing so, frames refer to widely recognized repertoires (Donati, 1992; Fisher, 1997): a frame's problem definition, causal explanation, and treatment recommendation jointly present a causal sequence that *instantiates* familiar ways in which issues are caused, and can be addressed (Sibley et al., 2006). Which kinds of causes (e.g. social structure, individual agency, divine order) and treatments (e.g. policy incentives, collective action, prayer) contribute to a frame is defined by the assumptions characterizing a repertoire (Donati, 1992; Fisher, 1997; Sibley et al., 2006). Specifically, repertoires provide specific *logics of action* that organize how people, ideas, things, the social and natural world interact: repertoires may understand the world as a market place, a social world of negotiated compromise, or a mechanistic world controlled by pulling the right levers. At the same time, repertoires emphasize a set of relevant – individual and collective – actors as well as given and mutable structures. To construct coherent accounts of a specific object, frames draw upon those interactions recognized as meaningful within a repertoire. For instance, a repertoire may highlight individuals' willful accumulation of economic value, which is contained and sanctioned through regulation and legal punishment. Within this repertoire, various frames can be constructed by selecting specific objects (e.g. Greece's



**Figure 1.** Categorization and coding system for the analysis of frames.

insolvency in the recent financial crisis) and identifying suitable causes (e.g. corrupt politicians) and solutions (e.g. criminal sanctions; Baden and Springer, 2014). Repertoires that recognize cultural customs, historical necessity, or systemic pressures as causes, by contrast, constitute very different frames, wherein neither individual politicians nor criminal punishment find an important place.

Frames’ moral evaluation dimension similarly draws upon established repertoires to define the evaluative standard for judgment. Frames provide an evaluative tendency, but do not normally explain the grounds for this evaluation, which are assumed as familiar. For instance, greed may be condemned morally, or it may be excused as functionally important for capitalist economies. Interpretative repertoires provide the *logic of evaluation* that renders frames’ evaluative judgments meaningful and widely acceptable (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006).

As is illustrated in Figure 1, frames are thus closely embedded into interpretative repertoires: they apply the assumptions underlying established, coherent ways of interpreting the world to concrete objects. Within the structure provided by the frame, each frame element can be filled in drawing upon suitable causes, treatments, and evaluations defined by the repertoire: a frame is created based on the repertoire’s assumptions about what kinds of objects and actors matter, how these primarily interact (as problem definitions, causal explanations, and treatment recommendations) and can be appraised (moral evaluation; Entman, 1993). Starting from the problem definition, each frame element



needs to clarify who (actor/s) or what (structure/s) constitutes the problem, cause, or possible treatment, and in what way. Likewise, the moral evaluation draws upon the repertoire to clarify why something is good or bad, and so derives its evaluative tendency (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). Inversely, repertoires group frames that draw upon the same set of objects and logics of interaction/evaluation: as these imply compatible assumptions about the world, they can be understood as commensurable interpretations despite other differences (Donati, 1992).

At the same time, frames constructed within one repertoire do not necessarily agree. For instance, neoclassical repertoires will typically seek for market-based explanations to account for the closure of a factory. However, they may arrive at different interpretations depending on whether they look at consumer markets, labor markets, or financial markets. In consequence, they may raise different evaluative implications against the same evaluative standard. All frames nevertheless agree on the overall logic for explaining and evaluating the situation: they do not constitute different interpretations of the world. When we assess the diversity of interpretations advanced in a public debate, therefore, we ask whether provided frames contribute to different interpretative repertoires: we investigate the background assumptions of advanced frames regarding the nature of relevant (inter)actions, the choice of relevant actions and structures, and the applied evaluative standard.

### *Diverse logics of action and evaluation*

Following Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), the huge diversity of imaginable evaluative standards can be organized into few basic kinds of justifications. Reviewing a vast number of evaluative texts in political discourse, the authors argue that objects can be regarded as ‘good’ because they are ‘inspired’, ‘popular’, ‘moral’, ‘conventional’, ‘profitable’, ‘functional’, or ‘ecologically sustainable’.<sup>2</sup> Each concrete evaluation can be subsumed under one of these seven logics (‘common worlds’). For instance, ‘moral’ evaluations derive their judgment from an ideal of a harmonic co-existence in a complex society; ‘inspired’ evaluations are absolutes that derive from some external truth, divinity, or greatness standard. Neither logic requires further justification, each represents an ends in itself, which is recognized as valuable across cultures and issue contexts. Table 1 lists the basic questions behind the ‘common worlds’ of justification.

While repertoires occasionally include multiple evaluative standards, they necessarily constitute a hierarchy of justifications wherein one logic provides the penultimate evaluation. For instance, a welfare-policy repertoire may appraise economic growth, but subordinate this goal to the ideal of a humane society (moral logic). The repertoire contains assumptions defining how secondary aims contribute to the superordinate one (e.g. profitability matters as far as it contributes to welfare). Accordingly, the evaluative standard that explains a frame’s (positive or negative) evaluative tendency indicates the first key determinant of the repertoire used.

Going beyond Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), these logics of justification correspond to specific logics of action: each logic appraises the outcomes of seven kinds of (inter)actions between people, things, ideas, and the world. For instance, inspired evaluations presume an action of believing or knowing. Popularity derives from an act of wanting,

**Table 1.** Logics of evaluation.

Logic of evaluation	Good is ...	Examples
Inspired	... what is true, divine, and amazing	+ righteous, pre-ordained, beautiful - false, uncreative, dull
Popular	... what the people want	+ preferred, popular, favorite - resented, feared, isolated
Moral	... what is social, fair, and moral	+ solidary, responsible, just - inhumane, asocial, egoistic
Civic	... what is accepted, decided, and conventional	+ legal, agreed, common - scandalous, unacceptable, inappropriate
Economic	... what is profitable and creates value	+ beneficial, economic, affordable - wasted, costly, unproductive
Functional	... what works	+ effective, necessary, quick - dysfunctional, inefficient, useless
Ecological	... what is sustainable and in balance with nature	+ sustainable, natural - unnatural, irreversible

**Table 2.** Logics of actions.

Logic of action	Interactions between ...	Examples
Believing	... the mind and the world	know, believe, trust, expect, invent, imagine
Desire	... the mind and objects	desire, support, resent, fear, pursue
Compassion	... the mind and people	trust, empathize, admonish
Negotiation	... people and the <i>social</i> world	advocate, regulate, concede, agree, fight
Exchange	... people and objects	purchase, borrow, produce, consume
Technology	... objects and the world	function, collapse, cause, accelerate
Life	... people and the <i>natural</i> world	regenerate, survive, harvest, pollute

while morality gains its relevance from the fact that people live together in a society. Likewise, civic evaluations require a world in which negotiations and agreements between people are concluded; economic evaluations make sense only if there are interactions of exchange and production; functionality evaluates the quality of mechanistic cause–effect-relations, while ecologic sustainability concerns interactions with life and nature in general. Like the logics of evaluation, the logics of action summarized in Table 2 subsume a wealth of concrete acts and relations, which can be uniquely grouped based on a common, underlying principle.

### *An operational strategy for measuring viewpoint diversity*

One thing that complicates the measurement of viewpoint diversity at the level of repertoires is that these are entirely empirical phenomena, which cannot be deduced from theoretical regularities (Fairclough, 2003). Also unusual combinations of evaluative and interaction logics may appear plausible and coherent if suitable explanations are provided:

for instance, most would reject the idea that problems in mechanistic interactions can be explained by divine will – however, this has not always been, and still is not to everyone, a far-fetched idea. Cultural beliefs and the institutions of public discourse, socialization, and education typically constrain the range of repertoires widely considered plausible in a society, but there is no telling which repertoires prevail.

Accordingly, a suitable way to identify repertoires is to depart from actual language use in discourse in an inductive fashion (Fairclough, 2003): identifying the frames advanced in discourse, we can identify which kinds of focal concerns are being framed. Specifically in news coverage, searching for frames is relatively straightforward: typically, articles' headlines or leads expressly determine the focal concern – what the article is about (Van Gorp, 2010). Starting from Entman's problem definition (Entman, 1993), we can identify attributed causes, cast evaluative judgments, and recommended treatments by asking: what brought this focal concern about, according to the text? How should it be evaluated, and why? And what is presented as a suitable course of action upon the issue? This procedure reveals the frame elements of the article's main frame, and assigns specific functions to claims found in the text (Porto, 2005; Van Gorp, 2010). Relying on the coding of frame elements eases data collection and thus serves to improve reliability (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). In the same way, we can identify additional frames, which are often contained in news articles to present underlying source frames, entertain possible competing views, or elaborate on the causes, evaluations, or treatments of the primary frame: identifying what parts of the text are not immediately parts of the main frame's definition, we can determine how these form additional frame elements related to elements or objects touched by the primary frame. Given the orderly, professional structure of news articles, normally, all framing devices found in the text can be assigned either to the article's primary frame or one or multiple additional frames.

Once the frames presented in a text are identified, the respective four frame elements can be categorized in a content analytic fashion (see Baden and Springer, 2014). Crucially, we can classify the kind of interaction through which these objects constitute, cause, or treat the frame's focal problem according to the seven logics of action. Consider, for instance, the following headline taken from the *Guardian* (2 February 2015), which contains a primary frame in a nutshell: 'Greece's problems are the result of the eurozone having no fiscal policy'. The 'problems' are clearly related to its debt and growth (logic of exchange), but caused by a policy (or lack thereof: logic of negotiation); a treatment is implied but explicated in the text: the politicians need to reconsider (logic of believing) and then agree (logic of negotiation) on a better policy. In addition, from each frame's moral evaluation, we can identify which logic of evaluation best describes the evaluative standard applied: in the given example, the problem with the eurozone's nonpolicy is neither that it is objectively false (inspired), nor that it is unsustainable (ecological) – although it would be easy to construct such variants of the frame; the point is that it does not work (functional). Where similar kinds of objects are consistently explained by similar kinds of causes, and treated and evaluated in specific manners, we can conclude that a relevant repertoire is probably present (Doise et al., 1993).

Scrutinizing which logics are combined, in which characteristic frame functions, we can then figure out which further background assumptions are necessary to render these coherent (Donati, 1992). For instance, we may find that a situation described as economic

structure is explained through political collective agency, evaluated morally, and prayer is suggested as a solution. Accordingly, we need to assume that there is a reality wherein economic structures affect welfare (enabling moral judgment) and can be shaped by socially coordinated action (constituting collective agency). We also need to assume that there is a divine presence and its will either affects social coordination (changing the causal policy, e.g. by providing guidance), or directly shapes the economic structure (e.g. obliterating debts). Once these assumptions are in place, the repertoire can be interpreted. To identify repertoires, we thus proceed in three successive steps: first, we identify the framing devices manifested in the text. Second, we classify the frame elements using our seven logics of action and of evaluation – and possibly additional classification schemes for the raised objects (see Figure 1). Finally, we search for regularities in the joint use of specific kinds of objects and interactions to identify common repertoires, and complete their description by considering what must be assumed to meaningfully combine these elements.

### *Assessing viewpoint diversity: different perspectives*

Once distinct repertoires are identified, we can assume several distinct perspectives upon the assessment of detected viewpoint diversity. A first approach is to simply determine the number of distinct patterns in which the respective logics are used for specific framing functions (*number of viewpoints*) – for example, by applying some clustering/topic modeling or, dimension reduction technique (Baden and Springer, 2014; Matthes and Kohring, 2008). If everything groups within one big set of references, we would conclude that viewpoint diversity is low, while many small clusters would indicate high diversity. However, this perspective overlooks that there may also be some diversity within one large set of commonly combined references: a pattern wherein economic transactions, political exchanges, and public demands are all common causes is discernibly more diverse than one allowing only one kind of causal interaction. Therefore, second, we can assess the uniqueness of ‘entries’ for the different ‘slots’ in constructed frames (*viewpoint variability*): a repertoire wherein each ‘slot’ is uniquely assigned has lower viewpoint diversity than one allowing variable entries to be combined without breaking coherence. Inversely, one can also assess the range of different functions in which a specific logic can appear, both within and across distinct repertoires – for example, using some entropy measure (McDonald and Dimmick, 2003). Third, we can derive another criterion of viewpoint diversity from the assumptions required to render detected repertoires coherent (*viewpoint distinctness*): assumptions made by different repertoires can overlap (e.g. sharing moral evaluation standards); they may be mutually compatible – either as elaborations upon one another (e.g. one repertoire assumes that individual action matters, another one assumes that ideas shape individual action), or as assumptions that are indifferent toward each other (e.g. one repertoire’s assumption that economic desires are causes and another’s assumption that a legal evaluation is appropriate); then, there are assumptions that collide, but are not strictly incompatible: repertoires may emphasize different logics or aspects without necessarily excluding others (e.g. political subsidies as solution do not exclude that financial market recovery might also be helpful); finally, we should not normally find contradictory or competing assumptions within

one repertoire, which would by implication become incoherent. However, across different repertoires, we can investigate whether their assumptions are mutually supportive, passively compatible, competing, or contradictory. A debate wherein all advanced repertoires are at least passively compatible is, accordingly, less diverse than one that includes viewpoints that cannot simultaneously be accepted. If we apply such measures alongside the more conventional coding of actors represented in the coverage, not only can we assess whether and when additional speakers increase the diversity of viewpoints represented: we can identify which speakers contribute what kinds of repertoires, and derive a map of aligned and competing, dominant and marginal interpretations and positions in a debate.

## Discussion

As shown, it is both theoretically desirable and operationally possible to develop a more precise notion of viewpoint diversity. We have argued that this notion should focus on the content of offered interpretations, which is closest to the construct's theoretical and normative relevance, and able to inform operational measurement and assessment. We disentangle this central construct from closely related, but distinct constructs it is frequently confounded with – most notably, political slant and the diversity of speakers. We propose an operational measurement strategy to address viewpoint diversity, more narrowly understood as frames referring to distinct interpretative repertoires. Moreover, reflecting the need to assess viewpoint diversity independently from the concrete contents of a debate, we develop a measure that is transferrable across a wide variety of contexts and enables comparative analysis. Following our above arguments, we propose three main postulates for future research:

1. *Access viewpoints directly.* Viewpoints are more complex than mere endorsement/rejection of a given proposition, or a left–right–continuum, or even party-specific narratives: measures of viewpoint diversity should directly target the diverse interpretations (frames, repertoires) arising from specific possible points of view (Wetherell and Potter, 1988), and explain how distinguished viewpoints are indeed ‘diverse’ in a meaningful sense (Herman, 1985). Operational measures and distinctions between different viewpoints can be put into relation with their various postulated ‘proxies’ used in existing research (Voakes et al., 1996).
2. *Investigate relationships with antecedent constructs.* The diversity of speakers represented (often used as ‘proxy’ for measuring viewpoint diversity) is distinct from, but evidently related to the diversity of viewpoints expressed. The same is true for other forms of diversity – concerning ownership, newsrooms composition, covered topics, media formats, and so on (Ho and Quinn, 2008; Napoli, 1999; Pritchard, 2002; Zerback, 2013) – and many further factors that moderate the production of diverse news. Studies should combine direct measures and antecedents of viewpoint diversity (e.g. coding speakers and viewpoints to see which sources contribute new views, under what kind of circumstances, to test and elaborate upon the assumptions behind indexing; Voakes et al., 1996). Another aspect concerns applying equivalent measures to different debates and

contexts to comparatively investigate their respective influences (e.g. comparing journalistic and citizen media debates, or debates in different times and countries, etc.; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011). For this, measures are needed which can, like ours, be transferred across debates and contexts.

3. *Explicate evaluative standards applied.* There is no simple assessment of how much viewpoint diversity is desirable (Bennett, 1996; Benson, 2009; Porto, 2007). Both the normative standards derived from democratic theory, and possible empirical standards – for example, audience perceptions and appraisals of diversity, the quality of resulting opinion formation or debates (Steenbergen et al., 2003) – can justify quite different expectations, and lead to different evaluations of equivalent findings. Studies should explicate their respective standards, and subject the implied relations between viewpoint diversity and its desired implications to empirical test where possible. Research can investigate how measured viewpoint diversity influences audiences' feeling well-informed, denied full information, or overwhelmed by complexity; we can test which levels of viewpoint diversity foster audiences' ability and motivation to formulate free, deviant, or even creative personal views (Gamson, 1996; Schaap, 2006), and seek evidence how viewpoint diversity indeed improves the quality of democratic debates.

Our refined, comparative measure also opens up a range of new questions beyond the study of the practice and democratic functions of journalism. For instance, political scientists may be interested whether different partisan discourses advance more or less similar interpretations, or are internally highly or weakly cohesive (Shenhav, 2005). Likewise, we can investigate how participatory journalism or user commentary affirms, complements, or challenges offered media repertoires (Baden and Springer, 2014; Schaap, 2006; Springer et al., 2015). Through our comparative, semi-inductive, and highly flexible measure of viewpoint diversity, we can investigate the causes and effects of even subtle variations in the degree of diversity achieved:

- *As dependent variable.* How do different systemic (media systems, legislation, etc.), cultural, professional, and strategic influences, publics, and topics shape viewpoint diversity in public debates?
- *As independent variable.* How do different forms of viewpoint diversity shape personal and collective opinion formation, political participation, and policy making?
- *As reflexive process.* How does viewpoint diversity converge or diverge, shaping hegemony or consensus, fragmentation or polarization?

Our conceptual clarification chiefly distinguishes viewpoint diversity from a variety of related but distinct constructs that it is often confounded with, and furthermore enables us to discriminate between meaningful diversity and mere variability among otherwise commensurable frames. Our operational strategy allows empirical validation of both our proposed distinctions and relations. And our case-independent methodological

approach renders this increased precision valuable and applicable for empirical research within and beyond the field of journalism studies (Benson, 2009). Specifically, the opportunity for comparative measurement – including inter-temporal comparison (Motta and Baden, 2013; Wessler, 1999) – allows us to address numerous old and new questions, from the micro level of individual practice and reception, over the dynamics of debate fragmentation or consensus formation, to the macro level of discursive hegemony and democratic power.

### *Limitations*

Considering the limitations of our strategy, our detection of repertoires depends on the consistency in their use (Fairclough, 2003; Wetherell and Potter, 1988), and may thus overlook single consequential contributions in a debate. Also, its deductive classification of logics loses the nuanced assessment of qualitative strategies, and the case-specific attunement of well-informed framing studies (Hayes and Guardino, 2010; Van Zoonen, 1992). Still, our strategy retains considerable details while its generic categorization enables rigorous comparison on multiple levels of abstraction.

Next, our empiricist definition of relevant viewpoint diversity ignores that some repertoires make more sense and contribute more valuably to a democratic debate than others (Curran, 2005). Our definition includes or even privileges extremist viewpoints, whose constrained, deviant set of assumptions registers well. However, this may also be a valuable strength: unlike source-based measures, for which radical leaders are the only discernable carriers of extremist discourse, our approach detects radical viewpoints also when they are alluded to by mainstream actors (Bos et al., 2010). Likewise, we are unlikely to miss infrequent, consistent viewpoints, while ‘odd’ frames may easily be forgotten in conventional frame analyses. Once distinct repertoires have been found, our strategy provides rich information for normatively evaluating which contributions to viewpoint diversity are valuable.

### *Conclusion*

In sum, we have argued that the diversity of viewpoints represented in a debate deserves further attention, and have elaborated upon present theorizing from a discourse theoretical point of view. To make our arguments fruitful for research, we have developed an operational strategy for assessing viewpoint diversity that goes beyond existing measures based on sources or slant, frames and constrained ideologies. Our approach promises novel perspectives both for the theoretical conceptualization of diverse media content, and for its valid, intersubjective, and comparative empirical analysis.

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## Notes

1. We thereby exclude ‘equivalence frames’ (Chong and Druckman, 2007b) which do not provide different contextualizations, as well as ‘generic frames’ (Valkenburg et al., 1999), which are relatively neutral toward the specific interpretations they convey.
2. These labels partly differ from those used by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) to better highlight their relevance in contemporary news discourse.

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