



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW,
GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNICATION
(IJLGC)
www.ijlgc.com



ANALYZING NEWS FRAMES IN PRESS PHOTOGRAPHY, APPLYING RODRIGUEZ AND DIMITROVA'S FOUR-LEVEL FRAMEWORK

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 27.10.2024

Revised date: 07.11.2024

Accepted date: 03.12.2024

Published date: 18.12.2024

To cite this document:

Lam, T. V. T. G., & Lee, K. T. (2024). Sumber Maklumat dan Dinamika Politik Masyarakat di DUN Sungai Bakap, Pulau Pinang. *International Journal of Law, Government and Communication*, 9 (38), 326-340.

DOI: 10.35631/IJLGC.938021

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Abstract:

While framing theory has been widely used to analyze the textual aspects of media products, examining how issues or events are framed in standalone images or those accompanying text is less commonly explored. Rodriguez and Dimitrova suggested a four-level framework for identifying and analyzing visual frames that can be applied to study different types of visuals and mediums. The proposed framework considers the tangible components of images and the implicit meanings and cultural experiences that audiences bring to the analysis. This article aims to apply Rodriguez and Dimitrova's four levels of visual framing to analyze news frames in a press photograph about a typhoon, a domain of images with tremendous potential and challenges for scholars. The morality news frame was identified by a qualitative analysis of the examined photograph's denotative meaning, stylistic aspect, connotative meaning, and ideological aspect. This study further strengthens the significance and relevance of this visual framing analysis model in disaster framing. Conceptual consistency is reinforced and extended by revisiting and applying the proposed framework in previous research to examine images in different domains.

Keywords:

Cultural Interpretation, Media Analysis, News Frames, Press Images, Visual Analysis, Visual Framing

Introduction

The media plays a vital role in crisis management communication, particularly in disaster events. People turn to the media for quick updates on what is happening at a disaster scene.

Governments provide disaster warnings about mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery through the media. Literature has shown that how the media frames an event or issue impacts public perception of that event or issue (Entman, 1991; Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, 1991; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Although many studies have explored media frames based on the analysis of textual components, the analysis of visual frames has not received the attention it deserves. The present study aims to explore what visual frames Vietnamese media created when reporting a disaster event. Using Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) four-tiered model of visual framing, the article identifies visual frames of a photograph relating to Typhoon Molave that gained much public attention and news coverage in 2020 at four levels and analyzes them systematically.

In October 2020, Typhoon Molave, one of the strongest typhoons in twenty years, hit Vietnam's central coast, causing casualties and missing, compounding the impact of ongoing floods. Millions of people were at risk, with severe damage to homes, lost food supplies, and no access to clean water or sanitation. According to UNICEF's "Statement on impact of Storm Molave in Viet Nam", many displaced people, including women, children, and the elderly, relocated to flooded evacuation centers, facing poor health and hygiene conditions. Schools and businesses across the region closed for weeks, disrupting education further amid COVID-19 challenges. Health centers are also damaged, limiting access to basic health care.

The scope of this study geographically focuses on how Vietnamese media covered Typhoon Molave, specifically emphasizing press photography. The analysis centers around media coverage of Typhoon Molave's aftermath in 2020. The research is limited to analyzing visual frames in press photography using Rodriguez and Dimitrova's four-tier visual framing, particularly exploring themes like humanitarian response, vulnerability, and community resilience.

Objectives

The research objectives of this article are as follows: (i) to identify visual frames Vietnamese media used in a press photo of Typhoon Molave; (ii) to investigate how various visual framing techniques such as camera angles, shot sizes, and compositional choices shape public perceptions of the disaster, especially regarding humanitarian actions and community resilience; (iii) to analyze how cultural symbols and meanings are embedded in press images to resonate with Vietnamese audiences; (iv) to examine the ideological implications conveyed through the image, such as views on humanitarian response or resilience.

Literature Review

Overview of Framing Theory and Visual Framing

Erving Goffman (1974) is the pioneering scholar who introduced the idea of framing in the book *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. According to Goffman (1974), 'frames' are schemata of interpretation that allow people to "identify, perceive, format and label the countless events that occur in their lives" (Goffman, 1974, p.10). Later, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) further explained framing as the process of organizing experiences and finding their meaning in reference to existing perceptions. The authors defined a news frame as "the central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events... The frames suggest what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p.143). The power of framing is that audiences are forced to resort to

familiar systems, such as symbol systems, knowledge, or myths, to be able to explain any phenomenon in social life.

After Goffman (1974) proposed framing theory to the scope of human experience organization, many researchers have developed this theory for the narrower field of mass communication. In his analysis of Goffman's legacy, Gamson (1985) argued that the press's framing process is almost entirely implicit and taken for granted. Neither journalists nor the public realize this is a social construction process but see it as reporters reflecting on events. According to Gamson (1985), framing is the process of deciding what is selected, what is omitted, and what is emphasized through that news tells audiences about a packaged world. The media frame is defined as the core organizing idea of the encapsulated world, helping to make sense of the relevant facts, as well as suggest what issues need to be considered (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Focusing on media research, Todd Gitlin (1980) claimed that frames are tools that enable journalists to organize large volumes of information and package it effectively for their audiences. According to Gitlin (2003), media frames “are persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual” (Gitlin, 2003, p.7).

One of the most cited definitions of media framing is probably provided by Robert Entman (1993), that the framing process is “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Framing means selecting some aspects of the understanding of reality and making it stand out in the media text by emphasizing a way of explaining and evaluating ethics or/and a particular way of handling it.

Messaris and Abraham (2003) argued how images contribute to framing news stories. They pointed out, “If the impact of framing depends primarily on the frames being taken for granted, without the public being conscious of it, then clearly, anything that can change public perception can make a significant difference to the final outcome of the whole process” (Messaris & Abraham, 2003, p.215). This is particularly relevant for examining the role of press photography in conveying implicit messages that apply to analyzing Typhoon Molave's visual frames.

Other scholars have explored and adopted framing theory to break down the meaning of media products in terms of textual and visual analysis. Ghanem (1997) emphasized that images are also included as an essential part of news components under prominence as they give salience to the issue being addressed because images have a lasting impression in readers' minds. Gitlin (1980) identified images as framing devices, and Entman (1991) was one of the first scholars to examine the significance of visuals to framing processes.

According to Geise (2017), visual framing involves selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and emphasizing them through visual communication to make them prominent, meaningful, and memorable. This process visually promotes specific interpretations or evaluations of the described issue or item (Coleman, 2010; Entman, 1993). As a variation of the broader framing concept, visual framing pertains to using visual cues in media to align with

the cognitive frameworks of both communicators and recipients. Visual frames function as accentuated pictorial references, organizing and giving meaning to selected aspects of an issue, visually conveying its "central organizing idea" or frame (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143), and thereby influencing information processing and opinion formation.

In short, the theoretical framework of this article is grounded in framing theory, a method of organizing and interpreting information that helps people make sense of events (Goffman, 1974), and further developed in the context of media by many scholars (Entman, 1991; Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1980), emphasizing how journalists use frames, consciously or unconsciously, to select, emphasize, or omit information. The present study also adopts a four-level visual framing framework proposed by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011). This framework considers not only the tangible components of images (denotative meaning and stylistic aspects) but also their implicit meanings (connotative and ideological meaning) that help systematically analyze Typhoon Molave's image.

Visual Framing Research

Several relevant studies regarding visual framing research have provided additional knowledge for this article. Some of these studies have relied on both visuals and texts (Entman, 1991; Messaris & Abraham, 2001; Xu, Yu, & Löffelholz, 2024). The other studies examined the visual depiction of events based only on images (Fahmy, 2004; Fahmy, Kelly, & Kim, 2007; Borah, 2009).

Borah (2009) utilized a visual framing approach to compare how two American newspapers visually portrayed the first week of the Indian Ocean Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. The author used content analysis of all related photographs to identify a consistent set of frames to determine how The New York Times and The Washington Post visually covered these two natural disasters. Borah (2009) compiled and classified news frames related to these natural disasters into five categories: loss vs. gain, pragmatic, human interest, political, and others. The author explained that the loss vs. gain news frame was adapted from Kahneman and Tversky's (1984) lives lost vs. lives saved in their study of framing effects. The lives-lost news frame refers to images of death, and the lives-saved frame refers to images of survivors from the incidents and relief work. The pragmatic frame included images of general destruction, such as shattered buildings, unroofed houses, or flooded cities. Human interest frame refers to images highlighting the human dilemma in disasters, such as images of grieving citizens, suffering, and pain. The political frame is presented through images of politicians visiting the disaster sites.

Borah (2009) also found that the live-saved frame accounted for most of the examined images, followed by the pragmatic, human interest, and live-lost frames. Political news frames had the lowest percentage among the analyzed images, and images that could not be classified into the five generic news frames mentioned above were coded as other frames. According to Borah (2009), the way the New York Times used the human interest frame differed between Hurricane Katrina and the Tsunami. Most grieving and emotional photos in the Katrina coverage were long or full camera shots, denoting social distance. In contrast, the photos of the Tsunami were more closed-up shots, signifying intimate or personal connections. The Washington Post newspaper covered both disasters more visually than The New York Times did.

Nevertheless, the natural disasters were framed similarly in both newspapers. The Washington Post was equally cautious about depicting dead bodies and emotions in its coverage of Katrina. The physical devastation of Katrina was likewise prominently displayed by The Washington Post, although it emphasized the lives saved over the lives lost news frame in its coverage.

Also focusing primarily on image analysis, Fahmy (2004) conducted a content analysis to examine how Afghan women are visually represented in Associated Press (AP) images during and after the Taliban regime. The analysis was focused on aspects such as visual subordination, point of view, social distance, imaginary interaction, behavior, and overall portrayal. Fahmy (2004) found that despite evidence of visual subordination and framing stereotypes, women after the Taliban regime's fall are shown as more engaged, interactive, socially intimate, and symbolically equal to the audience. The study suggests that AP photographs present a nuanced view of Afghan women's liberation, showing that even after the Taliban regime's fall, women are often still seen wearing burqas, highlighting the complexities of social liberation in a traditional society.

In a similar study on the influence of wire services on the selection of newspaper photos, Fahmy et al. (2007) examined front-page photos in American newspapers and those distributed by two wire services covering Hurricane Katrina. Researchers discovered that images of flood victims were the most frequently featured, followed by photos depicting the suffering of non-white citizens and emotional scenes.

Focusing on analyzing both the image and accompanying text, Entman (1991) investigated news coverage about the U.S. shooting down an Iranian plane, framing it as a technical issue by downplaying the agency and the victims, as well as selecting specific graphics and adjectives. In contrast, the Soviet downing of a Korean jet was depicted as a moral outrage. In other words, American media utilized a technical news frame in reporting the U.S. downing of an Iranian plane. In contrast, they used a morality news frame in portraying the Soviet downing of a Korean jet by de-emphasizing the agency and the victims and the choice of graphics and adjectives.

According to Entman (1991), the U.S. media outlets' portrayal of the Korean Air Lines (KAL) incident emphasized the victims' humanity aspects, evoking empathy and framing it as a moral outrage. Media outlets used specific logos and full-page graphics of the exploding KAL plane to humanize the victims. At the same time, the Iran Air incident was presented with minimal visuals, making it seem like a technical issue. CBS Evening News repeatedly showed animations of the KAL flight path, using red to symbolize the explosion, while the Iran Air flight was less visually emphasized with green symbols. News stories featured images of KAL victims and grieving relatives, which were absent in the Iran Air coverage, further differentiating the moral framing of the two events.

Lee, Lim, and Shi (2022) conducted a content analysis study to explore how humanitarian aid organizations use visuals in messages related to natural disasters on their social media posts. By applying Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) four-tiered model of visual framing, the study identified and analyzed visual frames at four levels. The researchers also explored the relationship between various visual framing strategies and the public's responses to social media. The results indicated that organizations' visuals generally focused on victims and

disaster relief efforts. However, the aid organizations did not frequently use the most effective visual framing types.

Table 1: Summary of Research on Visual Media Framing

Authors	Findings
Borah (2009)	Frames: Loss vs. Gain, Pragmatic, Human Interest, Political
Entman (1991)	Frames: Technical, Morality The important role of frames in shaping public perception
Fahmy (2004), Fahmy et al. (2007)	Visual framing elements like perspective and subject positioning are highlighted. Media images of disaster focus on human suffering and emotional imagery.
Iyengar (1991)	Frames: Episodic, Thematic
Lee et al. (2022)	Aid organizations' images of disaster focus on victims and relief efforts. The impact of positive visual framing in disaster contexts.
Messaris & Abraham (2001)	Images can implicitly convey cultural or racial implications.
Semetko & Valkenburg (2000)	Frames: Attribution of Responsibility, Conflict, Economic Consequences, Human Interest, Morality
Xu, Y., Yu, J., & Löffelholz, M. (2024)	Salient frames: Politics, Instructions, Updates, Economic Impacts, Social Impacts.

Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) Approach To Visual Framing

Denotative Level

In Rodriguez and Dimitrova's (2011) study, Levels of Visual Framing, the authors used the term visuals or images to refer to drawings, illustrations, photographs, photo illustrations, and other graphic devices. These visuals, pictures, illustrations, and photographs are not mere decorations but powerful tools that can be analyzed or evaluated to identify the frames they convey. Similar to text, images can serve as framing devices (Gitlin, 1980; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011) if they employ various rhetorical techniques, such as metaphors, depictions, and symbols, to visually encapsulate the essence of an issue or event. This understanding is vital for journalists who harness the communicative power of photos to convey news frames in their stories and deliver them through words, engaging and intriguing their audiences.

In the first level of visual framing, the denotative level, images are perceived as visual stimuli that activate nerve cells in the eye to convey information to the human brain (Lester, 2006; Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). In other words, at this level, the viewer is prompted to answer questions such as who or what is depicted in the picture. This level of framing is closely related to the image's analog nature and indexical attributes (Messaris & Abraham, 2003), which indicate that the relationship between the image and its meaning is based on a one-to-one replicative similarity (Barthes, 1977; Borah, 2009). Meanwhile, the meaning of words is entirely different, arbitrary, and dependent on social norms. This image's characteristics are considered to be the difference between images and words in the context of visual framing.

Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) explained that the image exists through itself because of its analog characteristics, such as lines, colors, and shapes. Elements in an image form a

continuous entity that cannot be divided into separate codes. Therefore, pointing at a picture and saying look at this picture is the best way to describe it (Barthes, 2010). This characteristic also stipulates that the meaning of a single image can be denotative, that is, first-level meaning. The connotative meaning of an image, which adds depth and layers to its interpretation, is achieved through a complex process. This process involves analyzing external factors, such as photography angles, page layout, caption writing, and, more broadly, the symbol system, socially recognized symbols, and stereotypes.

Because of its analog characteristics, the first reading level is crucial in understanding images. At this level, images are approached through lines, colors, and shapes combined to create objects such as people, furniture, and landscapes. These objects are recorded and classified in the human brain based on experiences. A notable point is that although an image may contain all the formality characteristics of all the elements appearing in the image, viewers only notice what they know (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). That is why viewers often quickly frame the image around a few central elements. The reception of images based on individual experiences combined with human short-term memory results in an image often remaining with only a few identifiable details, along with the overarching theme of the photo.

At the denotative meaning level, visual framing is influenced not only by visual elements but also by textual and contextual cues. Headlines, photo captions, text on photos (e.g., advertisement on photos), and the broader context of the entire publication all contribute significantly to how an image is perceived. As Roland Barthes (1977) stated, an image can be framed by the name of the newspaper that publishes it, as a photo can "change its meaning if transferred from the conservative newspaper L'Aurore to the communist newspaper L'Humanite." (Barthes, 1977, p.15).

At this reading level, viewers tend to group elements close together in content and form, a strategy that allows for a relatively coherent interpretation of the image (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). This initial framing, however, is not a passive process. The photographer, the photo selector, and, importantly, the viewer all actively participate in the interpretation, often eliminating irrelevant or unrecognizable details to create a version of the image that aligns with their available experiences. For example, when comparing photos of the 2004 Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in two American newspapers, The Washington Post and The New York Times, Borah (2009) used the content analysis method to analyze press photos in the first week after the two disasters, answering the question of which subjects were most often framed. The results showed that the common characteristic is that both newspapers emphasize images related to survival or devastation. The difference is that newspapers showed more images of death and emotion during the Tsunami, while for Hurricane Katrina, images of rescue work were emphasized (Borah, 2009).

Stylistic Level

The second level of visual framing refers to stylistic aspects of the images. The standards of photography style, including formality and composition, play a crucial role in shaping the impact and interpretation of images. They are not just about how a photographer shoots a photo but also about how audiences understand and interpret the photo. The audiences, often unaware, play a significant part in framing the image's meaning based on its style (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). These stylistic standards encompass various elements such as camera shot sizes, composition, color, and the behavior of the subject being photographed. In addition,

different publications and photographers adhere to distinct criteria for photo selection, which further influences the images' visual storytelling and emotional resonance.

According to Kobre (2016), press images capture humanity, intimacy, action moments, and emotion. The impact of the photo is a crucial element in photo selection criteria, gradually increasing to the following levels: informative, which has less impact; graphical appeal; emotions; and privacy (Kobre, 2016). Journalists should capture the most private moments, regardless of the topic they photograph, as private images strongly influence the public (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

On the one hand, stylistic standards of photos are understood as image production techniques because any image requires a particular lighting environment and is regulated by a specific camera shot size, a particular color scheme, and a particular behavior of the photographed subject. On the other hand, this set of norms is itself a framework, and the photographer himself is framed and, at the same time, participates in the process of framing the photo. This framework is developed based on broader norms of socio-cultural values such as beauty, authenticity, and typicality (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011).

This second level of visual framing considers the “stylistic conventions and technological transformations involved in the representation” of an image (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011, p.54). These include how pictorial conventions and styles acquire social connotations, such as how a close-up image represents intimacy, a medium shot represents personal relationships, a full shot signifies social interaction and a long shot represents context, scope, and public distance (Berger, 1997).

For instance, in a comparative study comparing images of the Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina from two American newspapers, Borah (2009) pointed out that images of the Tsunami emphasize death and emotion more and are often posted in larger sizes. In the Tsunami case, these large-size photos with close-up shots of the dead man's face appear on the front pages. Meanwhile, images of death during Hurricane Katrina, if posted, are usually medium-sized and small sizes. Very few photos express the painful emotions of loss during Hurricane Katrina. If there are any, they are posted in small sizes, usually in medium shots, and only appear on the newspaper's inside pages. According to Borah (2009), this framing process stems from the fact that the victims of Hurricane Katrina were Americans, so the American press was more cautious when publishing photos of the victims due to worries about adverse reactions from the public. Meanwhile, the victims of the Tsunami lived far away from the United States, and close-up shots and pitiful images of them were considered acceptable, even giving a good impression to the public about the newspaper's ability to reflect reality (Borah, 2009).

Connotative Level

The third level of understanding visual framing involves analyzing the connotative meaning of the image. At this level, images are not just visual representations; they function as connotative systems or symbols that encapsulate ideas or concepts and effectively communicate social meaning. For instance, Entman (1991) discovered that U.S. magazines utilized logos featuring communist symbolism, such as the hammer and sickle, to depict Korean Air Lines (KAL) incident-related stories. According to Entman (1991), Newsweek used a sickle with an air-to-air missile, while Time featured a silhouette of the KAL plane inside a sickle. CBS Evening News used a large image of the KAL plane superimposed over flags with the hammer and

sickle. How U.S. magazines predominantly utilized the hammer and sickle symbols suggested that the incident was directly linked to the Soviet system by associating the event with the central, most familiar symbol of communism.

Therefore, Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) stated that "frames are identified by analyzing the presence of symbols in the pictorial field" (p.57). However, images cannot produce complete, coherent syntax because no code or accompanying grammar exists. This level of framing is related to an equally important characteristic of images: they are visual messages without codes (Barthes, 1977). This characteristic leads to the fact that images often have to be combined with other elements to create syntax, for example, with text, headlines, publications, or product names in the case of advertisements to help viewers understand the context or hidden meaning of the image.

At the third reading level, understanding images comprehensively necessitates situating them within their entire discursive context. This means that people, objects, and landscapes in the photo are no longer viewed as individual elements but are read in conjunction with the values, symbols, patterns, and ideas associated with them. According to Barthes (2012), this is the time to resort to the second symbol system, the symbol system of signs. Barthes (2012) applied this system to reading myths in the media, which contained many images, such as images of Roman figures on the screen, detergent advertisements, or scenes of executed Guatemalan communists. This emphasis on context deepens our understanding of the images we encounter, fostering a more attentive and critical approach to media consumption.

At this level, symbols, prejudices, and stereotypes are involved in the visual framing process of producers and receivers. As mentioned earlier, images create ambiguous syntax. Therefore, images have an advantage in framing, especially when conveying stereotypes about gender and race, nation, ethnicity, rich-poor hierarchies, and many other value systems at both individual and system levels (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011). According to Messaris and Abraham (2001), in the American media, to avoid being considered racist, issues related to African Americans are now quietly deployed through images without accompanying a story.

The power of images to describe and symbolize is immense, and they are a significant source of framed images of different ethnic groups. The shape and gestural features in photographs often attract attention and stimulate the formation of stereotypes. For example, on the level of written language, the phrase African Americans is used to replace words such as black in the vocabulary of American mainstream media (Hartley, 2020). However, the image of African Americans continues to be framed with AIDS, street crime, poverty, drugs, imprisonment, and ignorance (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p. 220). Once again, the connotative meaning of images is powerful because of the implicit system of symbols, which are often deeply rooted in the culture and can evoke strong responses from viewers. In everyday life, when accessing visual messages on advertisements, newspapers, and book covers, this reading level significantly provides the public with the necessary critical reading to avoid media manipulation.

Ideological level

At the fourth level of visual framing, the ideological aspects of the image are extracted. This reading level does not stop at dissecting the symbolic systems associated with the image's content but also considers the question, "Why is that so?". In other words, viewers need to

continue investigating to see what mechanism is hidden behind the symbolic system framed in the photo. This process unveils the power dynamics: Who benefits from this framing process? Who is emphasized in the image? Who must be silent? In short, whose discourse is that photo to achieve what purpose regarding power or interest?

As in the case of framing images of African Americans, the ideological aspect can be seen quite clearly in that the perspective being framed is that of the group of people in power, specifically the white group. The frequent negative portrayal of African Americans reflects the underlying power relationships related to race in American society. Of course, the beneficiaries here are those in power, and the characters who must be silent are the African American group (Messaris & Abraham, 2001, p.222).

Images are powerful tools with solid framing capabilities. The nature of images is implicitly recognized by the public and is less easily exploited than linguistic structures. The image does not have circular interpretations, reducing the cognitive burden on the viewer and making it easier to receive. While images are not capable of generating rational linguistic syntax, they are still thought to have the ability to induce emotional solid arousal (Hill, 2004, p.26). This emotional impact can influence public understanding and decision-making about framed issues.

Research Methods

This article applies qualitative research methods to investigate how the Vietnamese press reported on Typhoon Molave through visual (the photograph) and textual (the photo caption) aspects. Specifically, a four-tiered model of identifying and analyzing visual frames proposed by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011), namely (1) visuals as denotative systems, (2) visuals as stylistic-semiotic systems, (3) visuals as connotative systems, and (4) visuals as ideological representations, is adopted to generate and analyze data (Birks & Mills, 2015). This visual framing analysis approach is particularized into four operationalizable steps, as shown in Figure 1, that help to analyze the photograph and identify the embedded news frames.

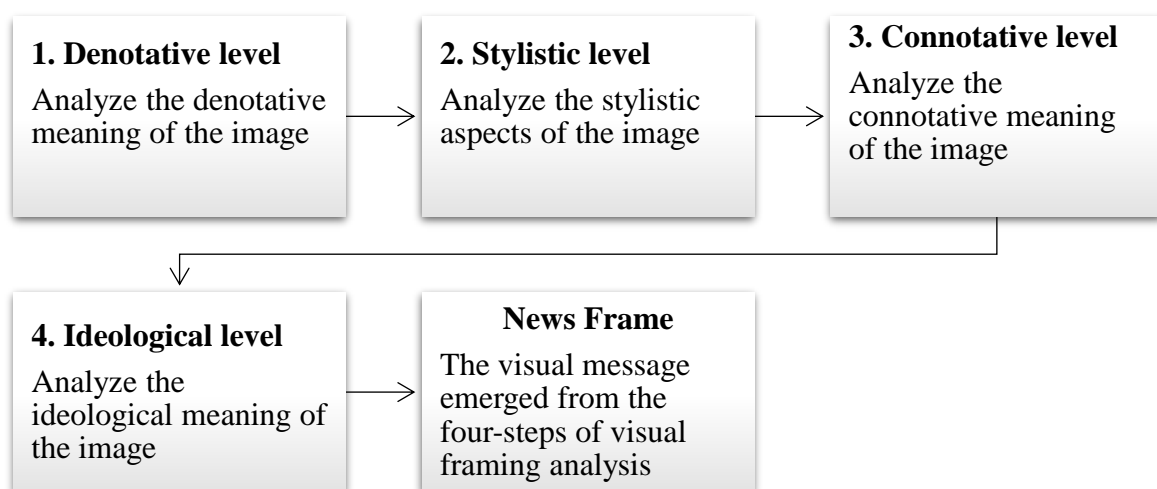


Figure 1: Levels of Visual Framing Analysis Proposed by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011)

When applying this four-level framework of visual framing analysis, it is crucial to consider a set of critical questions: Who, what, and what values are selected and highlighted in the image? Equally important are the questions about what values are omitted from the image. These questions are not just theoretical, but they form the basis of a practical approach to visual framing analysis. To illustrate this, four steps of visual framing analysis by Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) are utilized to investigate media frame(s) in a press photo. This photograph is about Typhoon Molave, locally known as Typhoon No.9, which occurred in Vietnam in 2020 and is presented in Appendix A.

This photograph is extracted from the article 'NASA công bố ảnh bão số 9 hướng đến Việt Nam' which is translated into English as 'NASA released photos of Typhoon No. 9 heading to Vietnam'. The article is published on the Vietnamese news portal 24h (24h.com.vn). According to SimilarWeb data, updated in May 2024, the news portal 24h (24h.com.vn) is ranked second in the top five websites in the News and Media Publishers category, with the most significant traffic in Vietnam.

Results

At first reading level, the photograph shows many people giving and receiving objects such as cartons, rice sacks, or rice bags. These items are essential for survival and are being distributed as part of relief efforts or donations to people affected by Typhoon Molave. People captured in the photo are primarily men wearing raincoats, some wearing casual t-shirts and short pants. They also wear helmets and caps on their heads. Some wear slippers, and some wear bare feet. Regarding the scenery in the photo, flooded water, flooded roads, and muddy ground can be seen. There are two small boats, one with a life buoy and another with many rice bags. Looking in the distance, we can see people's house roofs, electricity poles, and trees, primarily submerged in flood water. In short, at first glance, the photograph reveals a scene of resilience and mutual support. Many individuals, primarily men, are engaged in a collective effort to distribute essential items crucial for survival in such a crisis as a natural disaster.

At the second reading level, it can be noticed that the photo is taken at full shot size. Camera shot size can provide context for the viewer about the character's movement and the theme of the image or show off the setting. It is also crucial because each shot size selection will affect how viewers receive the visual messages (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011; Xu et al., 2024). For instance, a full shot is a camera shot in photography that lets the subject fill the frame from head to toe while still allowing some scenery features. Full shots can communicate characters' appearance, movement, mannerisms, traits, or actions before focusing on their reaction or feelings. Meanwhile, a close-up camera shot can capture the facial expressions or emotions expressed on the character's or victim's face.

In the current study, the viewer's eyes stop at the central scene where individuals give and receive relief items, then look further at the surrounding scenery, such as trees, house roofs, and flood water. It can be determined that the scene in the photo is outdoors with natural light. This also means it is not a set-up scenery in a studio with set lighting and background. The subjects in the photo are people in the area affected by Typhoon Molave and floods.

At the third reading level, the scenery in the photo presents the condition of the affected area when Typhoon Molave hit, for example, floodwater, muddy ground, and gloomy sky. People's clothing indicates that it was raining (wearing raincoats, helmets, caps), slippery roads (some

people wear bare feet to avoid slipping), traffic is not under normal conditions (the absence of motorbikes, the most common means of transportation in Vietnam, did not see cars or trucks). Instead, two boats are seen in the photo that can be perceived as a sign or a symbol of relief work. One boat is equipped with life buoys, and the other is laden with rice bags, which serve as a vital means of transportation and aid distribution in the flooded area. The words 'Cai Lan cooking oil,' a familiar cooking oil brand in Vietnam, can be seen on the carton. Rice and cooking oil are essential daily foods for Vietnamese people, and they were donated or distributed in the photo, implying support and help for people in the typhoon-affected areas. In the distance, the roofs of people's houses, electricity poles, and trees are partially submerged in flood water, a stark reminder of the typhoon's physical impact, which can be captured as the pragmatic frame (Borah, 2009)

At the fourth reading level, combining reading the image with related textual elements such as photo caption, there are two idioms in the photo caption. The first idiom in Vietnamese, 'tinh thần lá lành đùm lá rách' literally means 'The good leaves protect the worn-out leaves' in English, and the second idiom, 'trung thân tương ái' means solidarity and mutual love. In the context of this photo, the good leaves refer to people who have good living conditions (who were not living in affected areas by the Typhoon); the worn-out leaves refer to people suffering from the Typhoon. These two idioms imply the spirit of solidarity, love, and helping those in difficult situations, which are critical aspects of Vietnamese culture and social norms.

Another ideological aspect of the photo is related to a characteristic of Vietnamese journalism, which is content about positivity. Vietnamese journalism ideals and practices promote content about the good, emphasizing good people and good deeds (Tho, 1997). Even in a crisis like a typhoon, the content of positivity is promoted through the image of the relief effort in the photo and further emphasized by the photo's caption. This focus on positivity in Vietnamese journalism reflects the cultural values of resilience, community, and mutual support in adversity.

The morality news frame was embedded to convey information, using these two idioms in the photo caption to illustrate and further explain the photo's content. According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), the morality frame presents an event or issue in the context of religious beliefs or moral principles, which is the resilience and mutual support in this current study. Due to the journalistic standard of objectivity, reporters often refer to morality frames indirectly, such as by quoting others or implying moral concerns, allowing someone else to introduce the topic (Neuman et al., 1992). In this current study, the moral principle of solidarity spirit, mutual support, and emphasis on good people and good deeds is highlighted through the use of idioms.

Conclusion

This study addressed the research objectives by applying Rodriguez and Dimitrova's visual framing model and framing theory. Specifically, the morality news frame was found after thoroughly investigating the photograph's denotative meaning, stylistic aspects, connotative meaning, and ideological meaning. In other words, the journalist's selection of the photo, combined with the use of idioms that reflect the Vietnamese culture in the caption, created positive emotions in the context of disaster reporting, reinforcing hope, resilience, and courage. The results of this study contribute to reinforcing and supporting the relevance of Rodriguez

and Dimitrova's framework in the context of media studies, particularly in framing natural disasters.

This study applied four levels of visual framing to examine one press image related to a natural disaster, which has a particular limitation; specifically, the analysis was performed on one press photo and its caption. However, this limitation opens the door to exciting future research possibilities. Future studies could expand on studying a more extensive data set of photos or focus on analyzing visual frames in other communication domains. Research on the effects of visual frames on audiences also has tremendous potential and simultaneously brings significant challenges for scholars.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to acknowledge Dr. Lee Kuok Tiung for valuable academic guidance.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare there are no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix

Photo caption in Vietnamese: Tinh thần lá lành đùm lá rách, tương thân tương ái được người dân Việt Nam phát huy để giúp đỡ người dân vùng chịu ảnh hưởng do bão lũ. Ảnh: IFRC

Photo caption in English: Vietnamese people have promoted the spirit of mutual love and support to help people in areas affected by storms and floods. Photo: IFRC

