

# On the Prehistory of Framing Theory (1955-1973)

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## ABSTRACT

The Framing Theory constitutes a topic of active research with a relatively long-standing effort, which looks back upon a 60-year history from 1955 when the eminent anthropologist, Bateson proposed, for the first time, the concept “FRAME” in his path-breaking study 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy' to 2015 when our study was still in its infancy. However, the theory lacked an entry within the indexes of most textbooks till 1974 when Goffman’s work on “Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience” began to gain prominence as a canonical book in relevant studies, which, from social science circles' vantage point of official history in the present, is the generally recognized launch pad for the Framing Theory.

To shed light through a theoretical avenue on the mysterious silence regarding Bateson who actually led the way in the development of the Framing Theory, this paper, drawing on both original document analysis and secondary data analysis. By charting its much-awaited chronology, the paper identifies and labels the prehistory stage(1955-1973) of framing theory, with particularly close attention paid to the silence on “non-media effect framework”, “non-mass media framework” and “cultural framework” behind the evolution of the Theory. The landscape of the Framing Theory has seen a number of significant changes with regards to how ‘framing’ is perceived by communication academics in 1955 and a narrowing-down process is said to exist where the definition moved away from the ‘broad’ sense to the ‘narrow’ sense since 1973.

While Bateson’s work breaks new ground as his conception of ‘framework’, ‘meta-communication’ and ‘relational communication’ represents a pioneering attempt harnessing the literature pertaining to the Framing Theory, the silence on Bateson can be justified for several reasons. Such matters as his own interdisciplinary identity, lack of middle range theory contributions and spatiotemporal context of “effect is king” will profitably be taken on board by this paper.

To provide new communication-related material on the Framing theory, the paper believes the way forward might be the resort to constructivism approaches that underlie general human communication researches. In this vein, this paper, without losing track of the unresisted allure of real situations and local cultures to scholars, proposes the embedment of framework into culture and the substitution of three-dimensional research arena in place of the “media – audience” binary linear model. At the microscopic level, the paper looks at the issue in the light of cultural norms and tries to be more sensitive, attentive and responsive to the differences among jurisdictions within various spatiotemporal contexts. At the mesoscopic level, the paper, using ‘field’ as the basic unit, proceeds to depict, exploit and analyze the changing landscape on the part of both distinct frames and silent frames within the same spatiotemporal context. At the microscopic level, this paper ventures across the border to avail itself of the insights from neuroscience and media psychology domains in an effort to elucidate the resonance and the follow-up diffusion between exterior framing and the cognitive patterns of human brains.

**KEYWORDS :** Framing theory; framing effect; prehistory; Bateson; Silent framing

## Introduction

The beautiful metaphor with the slightest difference of a single word that compares 'frame' to 'picture frame' recognizes their similarity in the light of functions, with the former conveying the messages that endeavor to depict life experience while the latter mainly carrying photos, each of which captures in a single snapshot the real life state. Stated differently, 'frame' appears broadly similar to 'picture frame' in that both are capable of reflecting deeper contexts by virtue of symbol selection and re-organization. Frame paradigm and communication theory, two classic but inherently contested academic terrains which scholars keep journeying into and contributing new material, share a marked propinquity with each other as both draw from a wider range of disciplinary perspectives given their staggering breadth of interest,, but a series of general issues are still awaiting further scrutiny. (Schramm, 1964, 1981; Entman,1993; Pan , 2006 ; Lee , 2014)

### 1. Problem Awareness and Research Methodology

As information highly capable of shaping people's cognitive pattern, 'frame' phenomenon actually took place from the ancient periods onwards. According to Zhong Weiwen, Zang Guoren, Chen Runru, Zhang Wenqiang and Zhu Yufen (1993), the ancient Greek sage Aristotle(n.d.) has presently been credited with making the first comment on the 'frame' phenomenon by highlighting the strong grasp of tragic structure on people's attention and the rhetorical power vested with meticulously-devised metaphors. Hovland, Janis and Kelley(1953)'s reflections as to how different messages and attitude will interact also fall under the broad definition of 'frame effect' At the initial stage, scholars have commended the use of 'frame', a word in itself that could be seen as a complex rhetorical package combining both active and static perspectives. Later developments are innovatory in concept clarification. These include a growing appetite to use the word 'framing' or 'framework' to describe dynamic social construction process while associating 'frame' with static conditions.

The Framing Theory constitutes a topic of active research with a relatively long-standing effort, which looks back upon a 60-year history from 1955 when the eminent anthropologist, Bateson proposed, for the first time, the concept "FRAME" in his path-breaking study 'A Theory of Play and Fantasy' to 2015 (Hereinafter referred to as PLAY) when our study was still in its infancy. By Bateson's definition,

'frame' involves psychological principles and subjective processes underpinning both individual and organizational events(1955) The landscape of the Framing Theory has thence seen a number of significant changes with regards to how 'framing' is perceived by scholars. Some scholars have defined 'frame' as 'strategies tailored to draw attention to some aspects while excluding or discriminating others with regard to a specific issue (Entman, 1993); Some arrive at another workable definition of frame by referring to 'people's subjective explanations and thinking patterns behind a certain social event' (Tsang, 1999:68); From the viewpoint of some other scholars, frame can be stated in terms of 'the existing cognitive structure aiming at handle newly-acquired information by means of language or wording.' (D.Scheufele,1999) each of these definitions will not be examined at this point, suffice to know here that presently with increasing prescription, the term 'framing' comprises a set of concepts ranging from frame, framing to framework.

However, the framing theory lacked an entry within the indexes of most textbooks till 1974 when Goffman's work on "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience" began to gain prominence as a canonical book in relevant studies, which, from social science circles' vantage point of official history in the present, is the generally recognized launch pad for the Framing Theory. A principal manifestation might be that in spite of the strong presence of Bateson in *History of communication study : A biographical approach* (Rogers, 1994: 89-91), no attempt has indeed been made to examine his paper 'PLAY'. Hitherto, only a few framing-history specialists and biographers including Tsang (1999: 3), Pan (2006) and Liu(2009) have revisited this issue in an attempt to bring Bateson a renewed standing within this academic field. Evidence of this sort suggests there is a time lag of about 20 years between theoretical recognition and reality in this academic arena.

Staying with this subject of charting the chronology for framing theory, we cannot help asking why it is the follower Goffman, rather than the actual forerunner Bateson, that starts communication scholars' asking similar types of questions about this classic 'framing' theory? What factors can help to explain the stark contrast between the positive appraisal on Goffman's achievements and the underestimation of Bateson's contributions? What kind of values or ideological preferences lie behind the hardly bridgeable 20-year time lag? How can we identify and label the 'remaining' frames and frame researchers —the absent, the lost or the silent?

The search for those 'absentees' or even 'missing persons' alongside the river of scientific thinking history has long risen in the academic agenda to become a field of study in its own right. Liu(2008) has distinguished two sub-categories as regards such 'absence phenomenon' that he terms the non-existent and the lost. In other words, certain scientific or philosophical insights may suffer a fate of oblivion given the chilling effects of the temporal and special pitfalls. These insights, once trapped by the temporal pitfall, which could be explained on the one hand by insight premature delivery, making them extremely hard to understand and accept, and on the other hand by scant attention paid to them, will slip silently and ultimately culminate in a simple failure. Besides, the spatial pitfall represents another danger. In some cases scientific insights may run into dimensional problems as these insight, albeit borne at a proper time as an instant media darling managing to graze people's attention, have relevance only for a particular sets of circumstances, implying a disturbingly high propensity of falling down on its job if applied to other contexts, which in turn makes the insights less tenable. These insights will therefore not be well-developed, let alone widely used, and will eventually decline amid disappointment. — In effect, scientific insights cannot choose their own fate, which is largely determined by the academia' follow-up work. For simplicity, it makes a great deal of difference if the insight manages to the scholars' eye or they just turn a blind eye to it. Hence, 'the silent' may be better suited to explain the above-mentioned phenomenon as compared to 'the lost'.

Summing up, with the valuable support provided by abundant first-hand and secondary documents, this paper attempts to provide new material on the extant related literature of the framing theory. To begin with, it seeks to establish a chronology of how Bateson evokes the term 'frame' in his thesis "A theory of play and fantasy"(1955). Then this paper will continue its effort to trace the development of the framing theory by examining what the landscape of the framing theory had experienced in the 20 years since the publication of Bateson's thesis, the so-called prehistory before 1974 when Goffman came up with his famous book 'Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience'. The paper will end with another contribution by shedding light on the academia's mysterious silence regarding Bateson who actually led the way in the development of the Framing Theory.

## 2. Framing as a Concept (1955)

The academic use of frame as a concept for scientific and logical reasoning rather than describing a phenomenon was pioneered by Bateson in 1955 when he, for the first time, insisted in his article 'PLAY' that 'a frame is meta-communication'. This article, presented by *Psychiatric Research Report*, investigates respectively the competence of animals and human beings using the same symbols to further their different communicative objectives and in this vein, testifies the effectiveness regarding the cornerstone of psychiatric treatment theory. The article concludes that, to that end, meta-communication ability on the part of both game players and observers hold itself out to be of crucial importance.

Bateson has identified two types of communication: the direct communication with clear goals and the abstract communication with unclear goals which is known as meta-communication. The central idea of meta-communication flows from Bateson's personal experience in San Francisco where he happened to see in a zoo that two monkeys seemingly engaged in a fight, but actually they were playing with each other, as evidenced by actions taken and signals transmitted during that process. In other words, as a process characterized by information exchange and manipulation, successful game-playing operates on the basis of mutual understanding of counterparty's gaming purpose. Here, fighting behavior has surpassed the sensory stimulation symbols of virulent physical attack as usually seen on the surface such that the respondent chooses to follow another set of explanatory rules, which in turn shapes the respondent's follow-up actions, a process we term 'meta-communication'. Bateson also points to the great reliance of meta-communication on mutual relationships of involved parties and their ability to spot and capture the hidden information embedded in communications. Each meta-communication unit consists of three groups of elements including sensory stimulation symbols, the embodied meaning as well as the explanatory principles and key information underlying symbol connection and progression. The third group of elements falls into the category of 'frame'. A shared 'frame' among involved actors provides the foundation for meta-communication, which, in this sense, confirms Bateson's argument.

A virtual environment model may help to facilitate a fuller understanding of the ‘frame’. As Figure 1 illustrates, a monkey reaches out its hand to another monkey with a banana in its hand, an action that can be explained quite differently from a number of perspectives, say, grabbing, accepting, playing, to name just a few. At this point, mutual relationship between the two monkeys come to the fore (a key message carried by ‘relational communication’) to mould the nature of ‘frame’ and actions thereof. For instance, suppose the two monkeys enjoy an intimate relationship, the frame (explanatory principles about demanding or sharing) will apply to render the hand-stretching a meaning of generous sharing, followed naturally by harmonious banana acceptance actions. The third monkey, as noted, assumes the role of on-looker and therefore has been excluded from the foregoing ‘framing’ process, which, nevertheless, may ‘frame’ this context in its own way to impose its own vision.

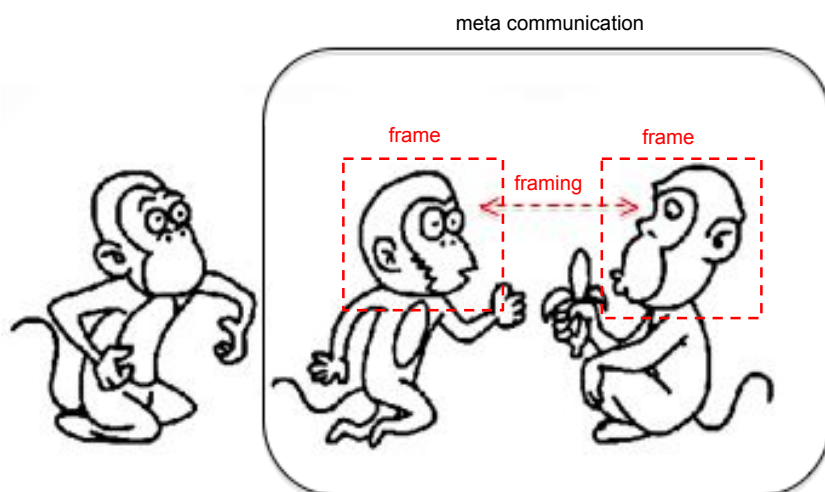


Figure 1: Virtual Model of “Frame & meta communication”

The rectangle dash line in the model represents the ‘frame’ which refers to the shared explanatory system which both the involved parties draw on to shape their reflections on the same set of meta-communication actions; the dash line with bidirectional arrows represents the ‘framing’ or ‘framework’ process where bilateral linear information sharing and flow are said to exist during abstract communications ; To conclude, these three dimensions underlie a meta-communication unit: the ‘frame’, the ‘framing’ (framework) process and their settings (or contexts).

The ideas of ‘frame’ and ‘meta-communication’ also have applications to the communication activities among dolphins, this is evident in Bateson’s

anthropology research in New Guinea. As a matter of fact, Bateson has devoted the majority of his research time to develop a general epistemology that intends to provide an omnipresent comprehensive descriptions which espouses a way of systematically evaluating the information collection, progression, organization, restructuring and dissemination competence of all living beings (Rieber,1989). 'Frame' is among such descriptions with a wealthy of important and meaningful information impacting on the perceptions of, and reactions to, the symbols by bilateral actors involved in meta-communication.

The broad framing theory building on 'frame', 'meta-communication' and 'rational communication' has established an intricate world of all-embracing nature with the intention of portraying, through devising ex post information rules on individual communication relationship, the vivid motion pictures about how the nature, animals and human beings interact with each other. Additionally, Bateson(1955), in an effort to elaborate on the vague notion of 'frame', also uses the analogies of 'set', 'picture' as well as 'context', hoping to create an all-inclusive theoretical framework straddling both macrosociology and microsociology domains. The arcane language, nevertheless, is an added complexity which, to a large extent, rules out consistent understanding of 'frame' and is unlikely to become less convoluted in the future. Not surprisingly, following in Bateson's footsteps proves to be a very difficult task for scholars, given Bateson's breadth of interest.(Rogers,1994: 89-91)

### **3. Frame as a Theory (1974)**

The 'broad frame theory' has not yet reached the state of middle-range theory, especially in the sense of operational convenience. The theories of middle range usually allow for both grand theory and careful investigation to be connected, in this regard, they should be 'a set of logically inter-linked propositions made up of certain hypotheses relating to two or more conceptual variables, leading, collectively, to the uniformity of experience.' (Merton,1949: 39) The progressive movement of the broad framing theory from multidisciplinary theoretical framework to middle-range theory, an important step in the development of the framing theory, benefits on the one hand from sociologists' elaborations on realities, and on the other hand, from psychologists' contributions to basic model constructions, a glaring example of which would be the publication of 'Frame Analysis' by sociologist Goffman(1974) that has general currency in this field.

Anthropologist Bateson's statement on psychological context has inspired Goffman(1974: 10-11) who deems frame as "important credentials which people rest on to transform social realities to subjective thoughts" or 'the location, perception, interpretation, and labelling of any specific event occurred'. Goffman (1974:5, 47, 79) also expands upon the groundwork laid by A. Schutz in his multiple realities theory (phenomenon scholar) (1945) to define more narrowly, with well-knitted terminologies, the term 'frame' as follows: 1) all the reversibility or copy of the reality actually means substitution of re-keyinged script in place of the reality itself. 2) Such script often harbors different keys on the same social subject matter. 3) A key that enjoys stronger ties with social daily life conduce to higher level of anchoring (being accepted by others) than the one whose social ties are weak.(Tsang, 1999:29). 4) various definitions compete in daily life with each other to hold itself out as the only reasonable explanation for reality, giving occasion to the mutual exclusion among, or combination of, the frames. Under Goffman's efforts, these frame-related concepts manage to gelled into a highly coherent package packages of theory with ever-increasing explanatory power and promotion values. For example, this paper could take its cue from the above-mentioned mutual exclusion among, or combination of, the frames when addressing the misplacement between silence and distinctiveness.

Goffman(1974:10-11) also defines 'frame' as 'psychological basic model that connects, through symbol conversion, individual cognition and social events.' Basic models belong to psychological concepts which have been referred to by scholars as expressing a similar meaning to 'frame' (Pan & Kosicki, 1993, 2001, 2005; Chung et. al.1993) The equation of frames with basic models, however, is not completely precise and accurate because similar in some way to 'human brains' warehouse', basic models, in point of fact, are abstract cognitive frameworks utilized by individuals to learn all kinds of experience and concepts. (B.Scheufele, & D.Scheufele, 2010), and, as such, may bear subordination relation to frames defined as a wealthy of useful information or a series of meaningful actions in response to certain events (Bateson, 1955).

Ever since its introduction to sociology, frame has been a topic that has stimulated discussions in a host of social science arenas- notably mass communication, political communication, scientific communication, visual communication, journalism, social movement, health, risk, environment and religion. Among them, behavior economists, psychologists and mass communication scholars are most likely to profit from the insights of the framing theory, given the flowering of research on 'distinctive frames' of many sorts within these disciplines, which, as



shown in figure 2, stands in stark contrast with scholars' disregard for, or more precisely, relative science on, nature frames, interpersonal frames, organizational communication frames as well as culture frames.

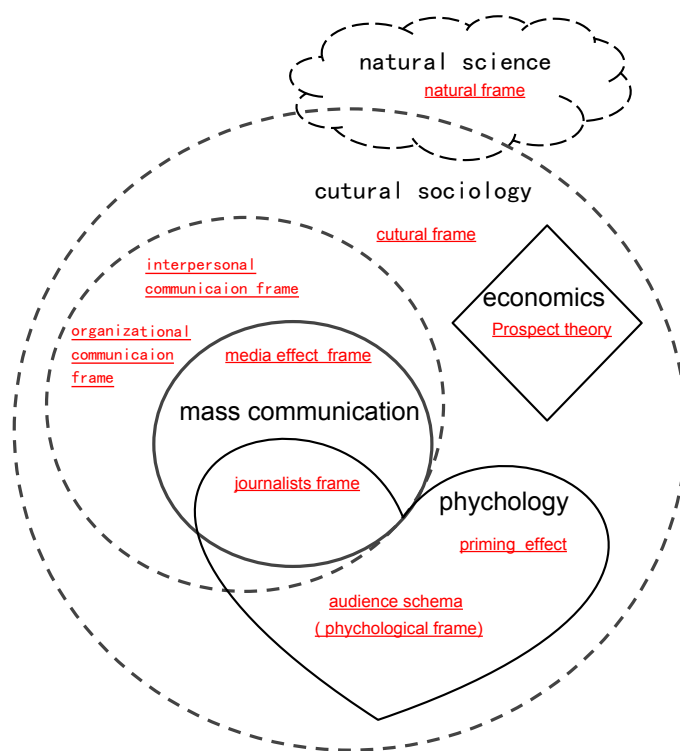


Figure2: Interdisciplinary theoretical context view of frame theory

Behavior economists see information frames as a pertinent factor that has the potential to exert controls over people's economic activities, thus proposing the influential 'prospect theory' (Kahneman, & Tversky, 1979; Tversky, & Kahneman, 1981, 1992). The major contribution of prospect theory is revealing the ineffectiveness of prevailing economic theories based on flawed hypotheses of decision-making as a fully rational process. The new theory takes account of individuals' varying risk appetite and includes it in its empirical equation, resolving many seemingly irrational phenomena to which old theories provide no answer, a great achievement for which Kahneman was awarded Nobel Prize in economic sciences in 2002.

In the framing theory's wake followed a series of new theories that are created by psychologists including 'priming effect' (Herr, Sherman, & Fazio, 1983; Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996) with which prior stimulus information may leave an impact upon the processing of stimulus information received later. A practical illustration is that more sketch shown to an individual might help an individual predict with

reasonable accuracy what the picture looks like. Likewise, such experience will also carry over to other draft prejudging activities, making identification much easier. By the same token, priming effect is also supposed to display its power when the previously accepted information and information received later are of the same kind, be them visual or auditory information, rendering the effect a title of implicit memory effect.

As evidenced by the fact that a host of books and reports emerged from all parts of academic spectrum, especially in behavior economics and psychology domains, to put new material on the framing theory, it might be plausible to claim that this theory has a more multifaceted and inclusive nature with reference to human behavior and social movement, which should lead to its growing prominence as 'general research subject for human communication'. (Du & Zhou, 2014) Surprisingly, however, framing theory debates, diffusing from Sociology to communication, continue to be dominated by the idea that 'effect is king'.

The landscape of the Framing Theory has seen a number of significant changes with regards to how 'framing' is perceived by communication academics over the past 60 years and a narrowing-down process is said to exist where the definition moved away from the 'broad' sense (the broad framing) to the 'narrow' sense (the narrow framing). Broadly, the term 'frame' encompasses a set of concepts ranging from nature frame (nature phenomena unaffected by human activities), primary frame (psychological principles and subjective processes underpinning both individual and organizational events), to social frame (explanatory strategies favored by social organizations in certain contexts) 132-133, while the term, if narrowly defined, is stated in the light of distinct media-effect frames articulated and emphasized in a strand of communication scholarship, giving rise to framing strategies mainly under two headings: 'emphasis frame' with which the emphasis in on different parts within the same text (Entman, 1993) and 'equivalence frames' conveying the same text information via different avenues. (D.Scheufele,1999) .

Lying behind these narrowing framing strategies are different research paradigms. A press release on President George W. Bush provides an excellent example. The report stated that "President George W. Bush, the 43rd U.S. president, did a great job economically" and that "President George W. Bush has strong religious belief." This has nothing to deal with frames, instead, it constitute two frames from the perspective of 'emphasis frame', and which, on the view of 'equivalence frames',

represent indeed two different things with differed defining features rather two frames. This has provoked a strong dispute during which the two paradigms were mutually criticizable as ‘broken paradigms’ (Entman, 1993) or under heavy attacks from each other for causing inflationary misuse and bringing disastrous confusion (D.Scheufele, 2014, quoted from Liang, 2014). In the conversations about framing strategies, it has become accepted by the advocate of equivalence frames that framing strategies actually reiterate the original message through different wording or phrasing without generating a change in communication texts, such as ‘supporting selection’ and ‘opposing life’ in abortion policies, ‘death duties’ and ‘inheritance tax’ in tax reforms, ‘gun control’ and ‘firearms safety’ in national security. To be specific, framing strategies establish, via varying rhetorics and contexts, different cognitive structures to frame the same text.

## **4. In Silence? In Action?**

In view of the first appearance of ‘frame’ or ‘framing’ in academic publications, it is anthropologist Bateson who breaks new ground and harnesses the literature pertaining to the framing theory while sociologist Goffman only follow suit by exclusively introducing into human society the broad frame theory with a previous aim of justifying broad meta-communications occurred in the natural world, animal kingdom and human society. Then a question naturally arises with reference to the driving forces behind the academia’s deep-seated respect for Goffman’s central place on the one side and disregard for Bateson’s pioneering attempt on the other in the development of the framing theory.

### ***4.1 Bateson’s Multidisciplinary Research Interest***

It has been argued, notably by Rogers (1986:99), that such vital human activities as communication will inevitably attract the attention of scholars with multidisciplinary interests and Bateson makes no exception. Bateson manages to explain animal communication by way of approaches generally encountered in anthropology, making interpersonal communication relevant to nearly all living beings. Through his efforts, writings on animal and human communication capabilities have become well-represented across scholarly publications on such matters as psychiatry. In doing so, he actually looks beyond his discipline of anthropology. Endeavoring to combine psychological, linguistic, linguistical, sociological, psychiatric, information- theoretical, control-theoretical, evolution-theoretical, animal communicational and human communicational insights, Bateson really leads the way in multidisciplinary investigations.

As an interdisciplinary scholar, Bateson often concerned himself with borderline topics, consequently nourishing the little acknowledgement, of wider circles, deliberately or unconsciously, on the sociological concepts initiated by him at that time, including meta-communication, relational communication as well as ecological communication. Bateson could not resist the allure of journeying into different academic domains and failed to act the way scholars of that age deems 'safe', that is, staying with a research subject on a continuing basis (Rieber, 1989). Bateson's ideas have penetrated over more academic arenas and given added momentum to the theoretical advancements in these fields, but in the meantime, exposed them to potential challenges of obscuring discipline boundaries. He thereby took on both roles of discipline contributor and betrayer, making his points hardly carried over to his peers with more concentrated perspectives in mind during a period when academic research was limited in scope, hindered by strict disciplinary boundaries, an interestingly important driver that moves his insights out of the academic mainstream of that age. (Liu, 2009)

Given his multidisciplinary interest, Bateson provides an incomplete, albeit informative, picture about the framing theory with a mere 2-page elaboration on the 'frame' in his 15-page 'PLAY' (Bateson, 1955), leaving matters of real 'framing' substance to be spelled in future studies. Bateson's book *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Bateson, 1972) provides more clue about frames, making the frame concept accessible to a wider audience interested in it. But this literature still has quite a ways to go. Two years later, a new theoretical architecture with more in-depth conclusions about 'frames' were achieved by Goffman in his book *'Frame Analysis'* (1974), whose remarkable exploitation in the 'frames' and middle range theories has made substantial advances in the study of the framing theory and outperformed his peer Bateson in terms of academic influence.

#### ***4.2 Goffman's middle-range theory actions***

As the undoubted real originator of the 'frame' concept, Bateson would have probably taken great pride in himself for being a man of both thought and action, if he had sustained his interest and continued his research by setting the study against the background of social contexts instead of extending his research remit into other areas. It comes as no surprise that Bateson's earlier examination of 'frames' has then been overshadowed by latter achievements.

In contrast, to improve refine this middle-range theoretical architecture, scholars of both thought and application, by placing the frame concept under the spotlight

of social contexts and examining it from all kinds of disciplinary perspectives, have moved the framing theory onwards, producing abundant scholarly work to abate conceptual ambiguity . To date, scholars continue to address new problems or close new gaps. Among them, Goffman, having developed applied concepts ranging from reversibility, keying, anchoring to rivalry, creates profound implications for follow-up studies; the Nobel Economic Prize winner Kahneman have been struggling with the invention of prospect theory and delivered important results; the psychologist Herr focuses his attention on priming effect and his efforts prove to be quite enlightening; the communication specializers Entman, D. Scheufele, Gamson and Tankard have also enriched the framing theory by respectively putting forward ‘emphasis frames,’ ‘equivalence frames’, ‘Interpretive package’ and ‘frame inventory’ on the methodology side; Tsang, after reviewing Taiwan news media episodes and information channels, promotes progress on the matters of media frames and reality constructions.

Less well-recognized in the framing literature are the achievements acquired by theory appliers, namely, Russell, Berger, Xu Mei-ling and Zhou Yu-qiong, who, regrettably, have conducted research with an application perspective in mind without due regard for theoretical construction.

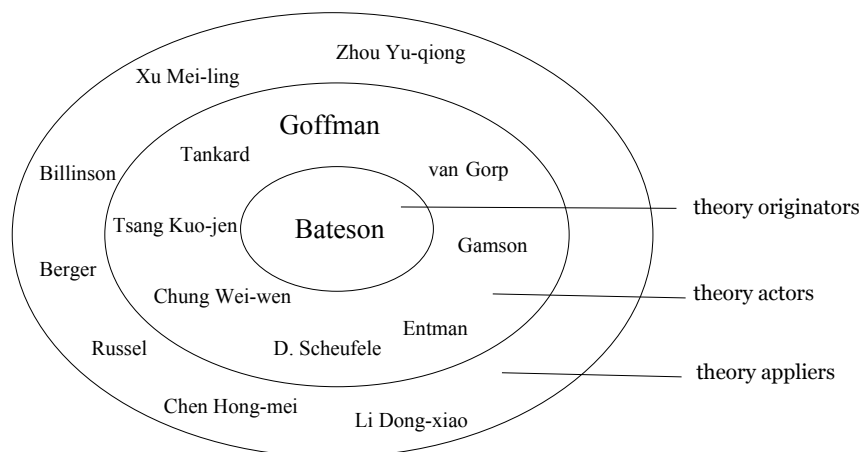


Figure3: Communication Scholars in Framing Theory Research

To conclude, Figure 3 briefly recalls, in descending order by research time and originality, the major contributors under the respective banners of theory originators, scholars of both thought and application, and theory appliers. While the 60-year evolution history of the framing theory did find other scholars ready and willing to contribute, the scholars of both thought and application, notably with their considerable effort having been placed into the exploration of social

contexts, the advancement of discipline development as well as theory improvement and refinement, have taken the lead in building up the grand palace of the framing theory. (Berger, A., 2014).

### ***4.3 Schramm's Effect-oriented Mass Communication Research***

As regards the knowledge field of communication discipline, scholars seemingly almost never agree, with divergent views being entertained by different schools including Chicago school, Frankfort School and other schools of criticism. Additionally, a variety of thoughts of cultural studies also constantly refreshing the communication-related knowledge. Then Schramm stepped in, bringing about the so-called 'hero genealogy, concept genealogy and classic genealogy regarding subject myth' which, having had to adapt to the needs and conditions prevalent in this field, provides researchers with disciplinary recognition and social identification. (Fang, 2008:38) in parallel with these developments, Schramm, aided by the high profile and attractive teaching material 'Mass Media in Modern Society' and 'Mass communications' (1949) that he edited, well delineates the proper disciplinary boundaries of communication and provides the mainstream paradigm basis characterized by experiment, quantification and effect-orientation on which communication research proceeds.

The publication of the book '*The Beginnings of Communication Study in America: A Personal Memoir*' (Schramm, 1997: 203) ushered in an era when the disciplinary thought of 'Effect is king' was gaining ground and began to dominate relevant studies till 1980. A sketch of outstanding academic societies and eminent scholars with substantial contributions in the field of communication has been given in this book, the choice of which apparently suits Schramm's particular personal preference. The book has capped decades of radical changes for the communication academia by reducing the number of communication discipline founders from as many as dozens to 4 and by completely removing Frankfort School from the list. (Hu, 2012: 203) While communication has become a fertile field particularly productive of fresh theories and approaches, the acknowledgement of quantitative studies on communication effect still lies at the center of the contemporary communication literature. (Rogers, 1994: 493).

On such an effect-oriented view, mass media such as television, broadcast and newspaper are seen in a favorable light given their strong unidirectionality, a proper strategic response in the mid - 20th century which turned on tastes and political preferences for preserving wartime propaganda research traditions and meanwhile moving to practical visions that could incorporate future

developments. But the associated benefits are somewhat obscured by the fact that they come at the expense of other research avenues, resulting in relatively few studies which target equally important topics such as mass media ownership and control power, bidirectional communication media covering telephone, telegram and personal letter, interpersonal communication and organizational communication.

Ever since 1948, the communication research arena has continued to be dominated by effect-oriented studies. The concepts of frame, meta-communication, rational communication, ecological communication and the like put forward by Bateson 7 years later were merely responding to new types of important questions divorced from mainstream academic considerations (Rogers,1994: 100). It is fairly understandable that as the first flush of academic support for interpersonal communication dies away, relevant theories are predisposed to be overridden and doomed to 'wither away' .

Like the four founders of communication discipline, namely, Lewin (1890-1947), Lasswell(1902-1980), Lazarsfeld(1901-1976) and Hovland(1921-1961), Bateson(1904-1980) only briefly touches upon communication issues. But unlike them, Bateson adopts a multi-disciplinary approach unhindered by research specialty or direction to tackle the issues. The term 'frame' that primarily attributes to Bateson is also dressed up in the color of all – embracing comprehensive idealism: Frame is a preferred tool utilized to find out the central meaning expressed by a certain thing or action; frame is a microcosm of the simplifying process which the search for commonalities of things and subsequent classification irrespective of individual difference are undergoing; frame is a cognitive griddle (Lin, 2004) which ferrets out the underlying facts in the labyrinth of realities so as to understand the society; frame is also a set of psychological concepts that involve tacit knowledge shared by the disseminator and the receiver, making communication between the two a success. Generally speaking, no frame, no communication.

## **5. Conclusions and Limitations**

Currently, the framing theory has become widely accepted and sometimes even applied to academic fronts on which this theory will offer little help. This paper traces the evolution of the framing theory, tying the missing link to the broader debate over framing history and meta-communication, demonstrating that the

paradigm myth of 'effect is king' in communication discipline is legitimately debatable, and arousing the curiosity of 'the silent' to look beyond their respective disciplines to initiate interdisciplinary dialogues when addressing new issues. This paper, drawing on both original document analysis and secondary data analysis, attempts to follow the mainstream logic of the Framing Theory and to provide correspondingly an outline of its development. By charting its much-awaited chronology, the paper identifies and labels three stages alongside the general theme including prehistory stage (1955-1973), sociological redirection stage (1974-) as well as communication studies redirection stage (1990s-), with particularly close attention paid to the dismal state of 'non-framing effect theory' in communication field in conjunction with the seldom-discussed few contributions by communication discipline to the refinement of the framing theory. The paper concludes that while Bateson's work breaks new ground as his conception of 'framework', 'meta-communication' and 'relational communication' represents a pioneering attempt harnessing the literature pertaining to the Framing Theory, the academia's silence on Bateson can be justified for several reasons.

Turning to mixed evidence as to the prestige of framing theory in economical and psychological fields and its somewhat dismal state in communication arena, a main and enduring contributor is present effect-oriented academic climate that favors middle-range theories, under which scholars specializing in framing theory are obsessed with empirical studies which have overshadowed the equally important theoretical issues. Looking to the future of the framing theory, Craig(1999)'s suggestions about the development of communication may provide some clue, 'a field rather than a mere discipline'. To be specific, for those scholars primarily interested in local culture and indigenous research subjects, the issue could be looked at in the light of cultural norms at the microscopic level as a response to real contexts and with the embedment of cultural frames, and its exploitation should be more sensitive and attentive to the fundamental differences of the way in which the same problem plays out among jurisdictions within various spatiotemporal contexts.

At the mesoscopic level, scholars could, using 'field' as the basic unit, proceed to depict, exploit and analyze the changing landscape on the part of both distinct frames and silent frames within the same spatiotemporal context. At the microscopic level, scholars could venture across the border to avail themselves of the insights from neuroscience and media psychology domains in an effort to



elucidate the resonance and the follow-up diffusion between exterior framing and the cognitive patterns of human brains.

Taking account of its research methodologies, the paper actually attempts to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy in communication field rather than add to the existing rich literature. Such matters as Bateson's own interdisciplinary identity, Goffman's middle range theory achievements, spatiotemporal context of "effect is king" and ill-timed interpersonal communication thoughts have been profitably be taken on board by this paper. Both analyses of the factors that propagate them and assessing framing theory's multidisciplinary evolution in detail have merit, but is beyond the scope of this paper, suggesting several theoretical avenues, say, metaphysical discussions on theoretical construction and experimental studies on relevant data, that could be employed in future studies.

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