

## JOKER IN NEWS MEDIA DISCOURSE

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**ABSTRACT.** The entertainment media often delivers cultural symbols, which occasionally inform news media discourse. Such is the case of the “Joker” being used as a symbol of chaos. Since the character’s existence and popularity generated a pool of possibilities for political associations, the latest Joker film by director Todd Phillips, which premiered in 2019, caused controversy on many levels: “The real threat of Joker is hiding in plain sight” (The New York Times 2019); “Joker isn’t an ode to the far right – it’s a warning against austerity” (The Guardian 2019). The polemical aspect of the discourse prompted by this film is apparent in the frames used by the news media to cover Joker’s premiere. This paper aims to identify these news media frames, using an inductive clustering method, and further investigate them by exploring theories of social construction of reality, with a focus on psychoanalytic aspects of the hero/villain myth that informs these news frames.

**Keywords:** *Media Frames, Myth, Constructivism, Joker.*

### Introduction

*Joker* is an American film classified as a psychological thriller, which premiered on August 31<sup>st</sup> 2019 at the Venice Film Festival and in the United States on October 4<sup>th</sup> 2019. It was directed by Todd Phillips, written by the same person in collaboration with Scott Silver, and it stars actor Joaquin Phoenix as the main character, Arthur Fleck, in what seems to be an origin story for the Joker character. What inspired

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controversy around this film's release is its confusing political undertone, sometimes characterized as "far-right" leaning or "far-left". This is due to the story's hero, Joker, a mentally ill and abused individual who inspires a revolution against the wealthy of Gotham City.

Since the film caused such polarizing discourse, the purpose of this study was to determine the news media frames of its release, and shine a light on the narratives that inform these frames. The study explores hero/villain myth narratives in media discourse as archetypal perspectives that form intrinsic parts of framing devices. The research questions formulated in order to achieve this are:

**RQ1:** What are the media frames used in the news coverage of *Joker's* release in The New York Times and The Guardian?

**RQ2:** What are the differences in the coverage of *Joker's* release by the The New York Times and The Guardian?

**RQ3:** How do hero/villain myth narratives inform media frames, considering a psychoanalytic approach?

**RQ4:** Which are the main differences between the hero/villain frames constructed by The New York Times and The Guardian?

In order to answer the first two questions, the researcher used a media effects theoretical framework with the aid of a mixed methods research design and investigated two elite media outlets' articles related to this film: The New York Times and The Guardian. The selection criteria for these outlets are popularity and geographical importance, since they are both internationally renowned outlets, yet they are more relevant on different sides of the Atlantic Ocean: The Guardian is a UK-based European media outlet, while The New York Times is an American one. The purpose of this selection is to facilitate a comparative analysis.

In addressing the last two questions, the researcher followed Berger's direction on the myth model, considering his inventory of psychoanalytic approaches to myth and Jung's theory of archetypes, which, together with De Bruijn's study of hero/villain frames in political communication, serve as theoretical foundation for applying these categories to this study's frames. The results will be quantified and presented in charts.

## Literature Review

### I. Framing: Media Frames

Mass media effects is an evolving theory with a number of influential models that have gone through a series of paradigm shifts in the last century. Researchers note several stages of development of these models throughout history, „pivoting on alternative notions of significant versus minimal effects” (Neuman and Guggenheim 2011). The first stage is marked by *the magic bullet theory* or *the hypodermic effects theory* (1930s to 1950s), while the second stage can be seen as suggested by Scheufele (1999), a paradigm shift given by the return of significant effects theory in the 70s, following Joseph Klapper’s minimal effects theory in *The Effects of Mass Communication*. What is also notable in this period is the emergence of agenda-setting research through McCombs and Shaw’s study (1972). The third stage saw the development of concepts of framing and priming as media effects models (Goffman, 1974; Iyengar, Peters and Kinder, 1982; Entman, 1993). Scheufele (1999, p. 105) identified this as a fourth stage characterized by *social constructivism*, which brings us to present time.

Neuman and Guggenheim (2011) identify six media effects models, which emerge in their cumulative research that spans over fifty years. Their fifth cluster of models, *Interpretive Effects Models*, contains the Agenda-Setting, Priming and Framing theories, which are of interest to this study. They identify three key publications related to these theories, based on the number of times they have been cited within these 50 years: *Experimental Demonstrations of the “Not-So-*

*Minimal” Consequences of Television News Programs* (Iyengar, Peters and Kinder 1982), *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media* (McCombs and Shaw 1972), and *Framing: Toward a clarification of a Fractured Paradigm* (Entman 1993).

This paper focuses on one of these media effects models, framing, ergo, the relevant literature also includes *Framing as a Theory of Media Effects* (Scheufele 1999) and *Framing: Media Frames* (D’Angelo 2017). Both Entman (1993) and Scheufele (1999) consider framing an

inconsistently defined concept, and suggest “research should address framing from a more metatheoretical perspective... within the realm of political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized on the basis of social constructivism” (Scheufele 1999). Regardless of how it is used, the concept of framing refers to the elevation to salience of certain issues through particular ways of highlighting information about the subject item:

A media frame is a structure of meaning, a central idea, organizing principle, master narrative, macroattribute, or theme—that can be implicit, or latent, in a mediated text but nonetheless imparts a clear, selective meaning to the words and visuals a communicator uses to contextualize a topic. (D’Angelo 2017, 5)

According to Entman, frames *define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and suggest remedies* (1993), however, “because salience is a product of the interaction of texts and receivers, the presence of frames in the text, as detected by researchers, does not guarantee their influence in audience thinking” (Entman, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm* 1993, 53). Thus, considering frames as “schemes for both presenting and comprehending news” (Scheufele 1999, 106), two concepts of framing can be identified: media frames and individual frames. Media frames are the essence of the issue that is being reported on; they are the way in which journalists present stories. Media frames have the potential to influence an audience’s set of opinions by stressing facts and values, making them more relevant. At the same time, media frames, as constructed by journalists, are filtered through the audience’s subjective interpretation, which can be informed by personal experience, value systems, beliefs, attitudes and biases, thus forming individual schemes for comprehending news media. Within media effects theory, these schemes are categorized as audience frames or individual frames, which are “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide an individual’s” processing of information (Entman and Rojecki 1993, 52).

Scheufele also divides frames as dependent and independent variables, according to their use in research, and classifies frames using a four-cell typology, in an attempt to mark four different areas of research

with regards to frames: media frames as dependent or independent variables, and individual frames as dependent or independent variables. This research will first focus on an exploratory analysis of media frames as independent variables and will follow Scheufele's direction on relevant literature, namely Entman and Rojecki's 1993 study *Freezing Out the Public: Elite and Media Framing of the U.S. Anti-Nuclear Movement*. It singled out four types of frames: "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman and Rojecki 1993, 52).

Matthes and Kohring (2008) applied these frames in their study *The Content Analysis of Media Frames: Toward Improving Reliability and Validity* and determined a need for hierarchical cluster analysis in order to extract a single frame for every story. Thus, this study will look at media frames as independent variables and will follow the same research design as the one suggested by Matthes and Kohring.

## ***II. Social constructivism. Myth narratives***

Entman's (1993) and Scheufele's (1999) theory of frames addresses "framing from a more metatheoretical perspective, [considering that] within the realm of political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized on the basis of social constructivism" (Scheufele 1999). In *The Social Construction of Reality*, Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann posit that reality is socially constructed. They define reality "as a quality appertaining to phenomena that we recognize as being independent of our own volition" (Berger and Luckmann 1966).

In order to address the third research question, the relevant literature explores Arthur Asa Berger's text on *Media, Myth, and Society* (2013), which looks at how popular culture informs our sense of reality through its inevitable use of myth narratives.

According to Berger, "if you scratch deep enough beneath the 'surface' of many texts you can often find a myth—an example of intertextuality" (2013), which he concludes explains why some texts resonate with certain audience members. Myths are stories that serve to validate rites, customs, belief systems, while they also explain socio-

cultural and political situations, which is why all cultures have created them in order to explain their existence, origins and values. (McLuhan, 1959; Eliade, 1961; Barthes, 1972; Baudrillard, 1981; Berger 2013; Tsymbalenko 2017).

According to Mircea Eliade, myths are stories that describe primordial events through the lens of characters in the form of gods, heroes and villains (Eliade, 1961). This theory, together with Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* offer a comprehensive approach to myth, which precede and inform Berger's take on myth. Barthes states that "a myth is a system of communication [...], a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (Barthes 1972, 107). In *Myth and Mass Media*, Marshal McLuhan stresses that even as we are not oblivious to mythical narratives in the news media, their capacity to subliminally impose are far too great not to consider:

They can be viewed at the same time as intelligible explanations of great tracts of time and of the experience of many processes, and they can be used as a means of perpetuating such bias and preference as they codify in their structure, [thus] mass media exerts a baneful influence on the human spirit (McLuhan 1959)

In *Myths in Media Communication* (2017), Tsymbalenko agrees and concludes that myths reflect content and structure-related alterations to modern media discourse. Considering the role that myths play in molding social life, Berger focuses on myths as the narratives that inform cultural, psychological and social aspects, as reflected in his myth model:

- *myth, defined as a sacred narrative that validates cultural beliefs and practices*
- *psychoanalytic reflections of the myth (when we can find them)*
- *historical manifestations of that myth (when we can find them)*
- *the myth in elite culture (operas, theatre, serious novels, etc.)*
- *the myth in mass-mediated or popular culture (songs, advertisements, TV shows)*
- *the myth in everyday life (when we can recognize it) (A. A. Berger 2013).*

### *III. Psychoanalysis, myth and media discourse*

In order to explore the psychological aspects of myth, Berger writes an inventory of psychoanalytic approaches to myth, which brings to surface Carl Jung's contributions to the study of myth. The author discusses Sigmund Freud's theory of the unconscious and Jung's take on the collective unconscious. He believed that Freud oversimplified his study of myths, while Jung offers a more comprehensive perspective on the study of myth forms, through archetypes.

The concept of archetype is partially rooted in Plato's *Ideas*, and even though it is impossible to define archetypes with complete accuracy due to their metaphysical nature, Jung attempts to develop an explanation for them by borrowing the terms „primordial image“ and „archaic image“ from Jakob Burckhardt. (Jacobi, 2018). These terms can be understood as motifs in stories, fairytales, fantasies, as Jung himself puts it:

The concept of the archetype is derived from the repeated observation that, for instance, the myths and fairy tales of world literature contain motifs that crop up everywhere. We meet [them] in the fantasies, dreams, deliria and delusions of individuals living today. These typical images and associations are what I call archetypal ideas (Storr, 1983)

Therefore, archetypes are psychological patterns that encompass human and animal behaviours within symbolic images. Some of the more common archetypal images and processes that can be found in myths, fantasies and games alike are: the father, the mother, the hero and the heroic quest, the evil monster, the descend into the abyss/hell/underworld, the animal companion, the sun cycle, birth, death.

Psychoanalysis uses Jung's collective unconscious manifestations such as archetypes, dreams and complexes through the process of cognitive transference, dream analysis and projection to explore trauma (Gross, 2001). This process of projection onto archetypal representations can describe how an individual has a positive or negative reaction

when met with certain media discourse, but also how the narratives at play might reinforce biases and perpetuate the internalization of certain belief systems.

One of Jung's most important archetypal representation is the hero, which generates myths of universal patterns (humble birth, superhuman strength, fast ascension to power, triumph in the face of evil and heroic sacrifice). When people are exposed to these stories of heroes' struggles, they unconsciously identify with them, which subliminally allows the ego to confront the darker aspects of the psyche.

This darkness is defined by Jung as a negative archetype, a villain to every hero, *the shadow*, which represents underdeveloped or repressed part of the subconscious. (Jung 1994). It often shows up as a threatening figure that when confronted, forces individuals to become aware of whatever it is that they might not accept about themselves and at times project unto others.

According to Hans De Bruijn, the author of *Hero or villain: framing in political communication*, frames often tap into social undercurrents, challenge or perpetuate core values and they contain a hero/villain aspect. This often leads audience towards subconsciously identifying with the frame, or strongly opposing it. The author explains the oversimplification of frames into hero/villain categories as relevant due to the emotional trigger factor that is attached to such frames. "As our emotions take over, we become increasingly susceptible to the kind of simple reasoning that underlies this frame. Emotions are thus the trigger of this frame – the spark that lights the fuse" (Bruijn 2017)

*Joker's* release caused so much controversy, that its emotionally triggering potential is reflected in news media discourse through its use of framing devices: "won't this movie cause dummies to think the Joker is good? To ask the question is to argue that nuance is dangerous" (The New York Times 2019); "Joker isn't an ode to the far right – it's a warning against austerity" (The Guardian 2019); "If that feels a little too dangerous right now, maybe it's a sign of how close to the edge we are" (The Guardian 2019). Consequently, this study will



analyze the resulting news articles frames and categorize them as pertaining to the hero/villain narrative, as informed by Jungian psychoanalysis.

## Methods

This study's sample consists of 28 articles extracted using an automated data collection tool, which allows for API interrogation, called Web Scraper Chrome Extension. It facilitated the obtaining of all Joker related news articles, 11 articles published by The Guardian and 17 articles published by The New York Times. The time frame was set between August 31<sup>st</sup> and October 31<sup>st</sup> of 2019, around the time of the film's international release. In terms of approach, this sample size is a convenience sample, as two elite media outlets were used as sources, an American one and a European one.

The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative research methods in order to gather the data and analyze it. Following Matthes and Kohrig's (2008) research design, the first step in this analysis uses a qualitative approach that applies thematic coding to a categorical type of content analysis, which looks at discourse structures in the sampled articles. Thematic coding is a "categorization or observational extracts with reference to certain concepts, themes, heading [...] It is an attempt to identify, compare, contrast meaning elements, as they emerge from and recur in several different contexts." (Jensen 2002, 247) In order to apply thematic coding to the frame elements, the researcher used Entman's categories of framing elements, which were deductively coded using MaxQDA. These elements will be seen as variables, as follows:

If these elements are understood as variables, each of them can have several categories in a content analysis. A problem definition can consist of an issue and relevant actors that discuss the problem. A causal interpretation is an attribution of failure or success regarding a specific outcome. An evaluation can be positive, negative, or neutral and can refer to different objects. Finally, a treatment recommendation

can include a call for or against a certain action. (Matthes and Kohring 2008, 264) Once these variables were coded, the research employed a quantitative analysis tool, KH Coder, in order to determine a hierarchical cluster analysis of those elements, which revealed the main framing patterns. "That means when some elements group together systematically in a specific way, they form a pattern that can be identified across several texts in a sample. We call these patterns frames" (Matthes and Kohring 2008, 263).

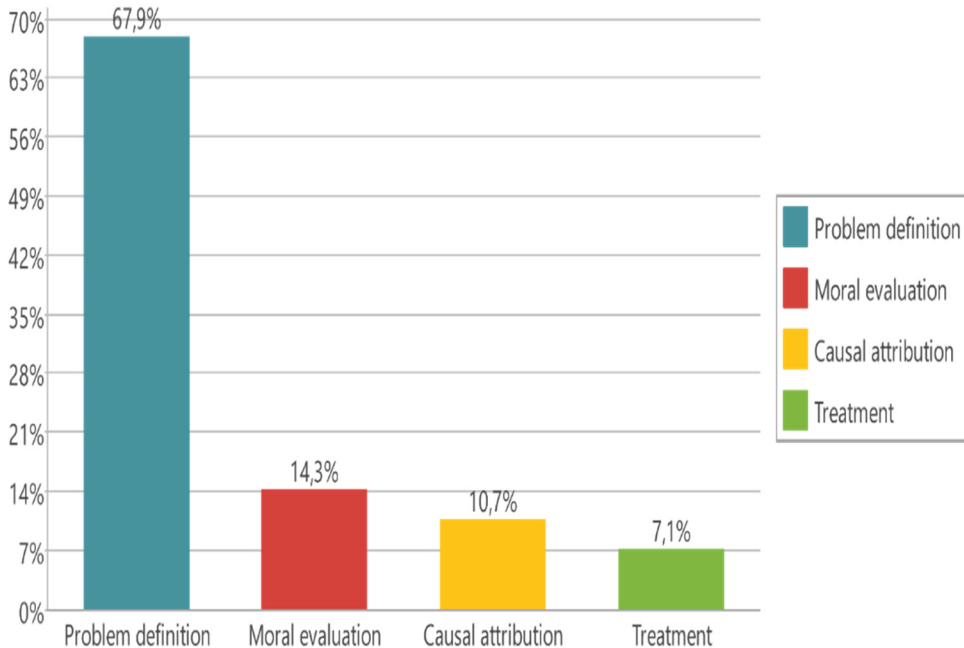
The hierarchical cluster analysis was set to use the Ward method, with the entire articles as the unit of analysis. The most noteworthy variables were identified within clusters with the highest means. Once the frames were identified, the researcher named them using inductive methods of coding, and quantified the resulting codes and data with the aid of MaxQDA, which is a software for qualitative and mixed methods research.

Once the frames are identified, the research employs qualitative methods in order to analyze the news articles' frames. This step in the analysis uses a qualitative synthesis approach that reviews and links relevant theory on media myths and the hero/villain archetypes, as presented in the literature review. Then it applies thematic coding to a categorical type of content analysis, which looks at discourse structures in the sampled articles. These previously identified frames will now be subcategorized using risk or benefit attributes, which serve to establish the frame elements as hero/villain. Once these variables are coded, they are named using inductive methods of coding. The resulting codes and data are then quantified to produce comparative results in the form of charts.

## **Analysis. Results**

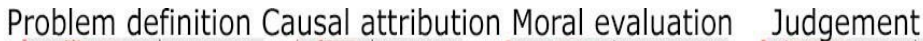
Once the samples were gathered, the article texts were introduced as separate documents in MaxQDA, for thematic coding, according to Entman's four framing variables: problem definition, moral evaluation, causal attribution and treatment. The researcher

performed qualitative content analysis on every article and manually coded the variables, using the entire articles as single units of analysis. The results were quantified, in order to get an idea on which framing devices were most used, as can be seen in fig. 1:



**Fig. 1:** Framing Devices

The next step in the analysis was creating four separate projects in KHCoder, using the articles belonging to each framing device as a single project per category, in order to perform hierarchical cluster analysis and further identify frames. Data was manipulated in order to exclude prepositions and the media outlet's names from the analysis. The resulting charts can be observed next, in fig. 2.:



### Fig 2: Hierarchical Cluster Analysis

The clusters with the highest means donned the most noteworthy variables, which were then coded in MaxQDA.

For the problem definition framing devices, seven noteworthy clusters were identified, based on the topics discussed. The researcher coded them in MaxQDA and determined the following variables: Box Office (word clusters include "sale", "ticket"), Character Study, Character Scene, Character Comparison (word clusters for character related articles include "character", "music", "voice", "laugh", "best"), Public Concern ("gun", "violence", "people", "kill"), Relevance Neutral and Relevance Negative ("play", "joker", "role", "actor", "scene").

For the causal attribution framing device, two clusters were identified, as presented in fig. 3:

Risk Attribution (“illness”, “mental”, “portrayal”, “violence”, “fear”, “order”) and Benefit Attribution (“Scorsese”, “regime”, “Batman”).

For the moral evaluation category, two clusters were identified: Benefits: Call to action (“need”, “message”, “political”, “character”, “society”, “people”) and Risks: Moral (“story”, “superhero”, “incel”, “Taxi Driver”).

For the treatment category, another two clusters were identified: Judgement: Positive (“cinematic”, “superhero”, “society”, “future”) and Judgement: Negative (“issue”, “health”, “mental”, “disability”, “condition”).

In order to yield comparative results, the sample data was quantitatively divided according to the media outlet source, as seen in figure 1.3:

	New York Times	The Guardian
▼ Treatment		9,5%
Judgement: Positive		4,8%
Judgement: Negative		4,8%
▼ Moral evaluation		19,0%
Benefits: Call to action		9,5%
Risks: Moral		9,5%
▼ Causal attribution	8,8%	4,8%
Risk attribution	5,9%	4,8%
Benefit attribution	2,9%	
▼ Problem definition	41,2%	19,0%
Topic: Box Office	5,9%	
Topic: Character study	2,9%	
Topic: Character scene	5,9%	
Topic: Character comparison	5,9%	
Topic: Public concern	8,8%	4,8%
Topic: Relevance Neutral	5,9%	4,8%
Topic: Relevance Negative	5,9%	4,8%
Σ SUM	100,0%	100,0%
# N = Documents	17 (60,7%)	11 (39,3%)

**Fig. 3:** Comparative Coded Variables

What the data reveals in terms of comparing media outlets frames is that The New York Times' articles were majoritarian in their problem definition frames (41,2% of articles fit into this category), with no articles framed as treatment or moral evaluation, and 8.8% of articles belonging to the causal attribution category. The Guardian frames are evenly divided between problem definition and moral evaluation (19%), with smaller percentages of causal attribution frames (4.8%) and treatment (9.5%).

Once these framing patterns were identified, the researcher named them using inductive methods of coding, with the aid of the memo tool in MaxQDA, which was used during the qualitative content analysis in order to single out relevant article segments for the purpose of accurately naming frames, as follows:

### **1. *Problem definition frame element:***

**1.1.** Topic: Box Office was named an **Economic Prospect** frame, since it offers information about the film's earnings:

"Warner Bros. continued to rake in money with the grave supervillain story "Joker," which topped the domestic box office Friday through Sunday with an estimated \$55 million in ticket sales. The movie picked up an additional \$123.7 million overseas this weekend according to the studio, bringing its worldwide cumulative tally to about \$543.9 million after only its second weekend in theaters." (The New York Times, Cohn 2019)

**1.2.** Topic: Character study, Topic: Character scene and Topic: Character comparison are human interest frames that focus on the actor's performance from different angles, either as a character study of Joaquin Pheonix, "Phoenix said his criteria for choosing work are actually quite clear-cut. "I don't really care about genre or budget size, anything like that," he said." (The New York Times, Itzkoff 2019) or as performance comparison and ranking: "How does Joaquin Phoenix measure up to the actors who have played the Joker before?" (The New York Times, Bailey 2019) and thus, the resulting frame was named **Performance**.

**1.3. Topic:** Public concern brings forward issues of interest to the public: “Following concerns about the potential for violence, several chains will not allow face coverings or clothing that “would make other guests feel uncomfortable” (The Guardian, Pulver 2019). The frame was named **Public Concern**.

**1.4. Topic:** Relevance Neutral and Topic: Relevance Negative have been classified under the frame **Relevance**, regardless of the stated point of view being positive, neutral or negative. “To be worth arguing about, a movie must first of all be interesting [...] “Joker,” an empty, foggy exercise in second-hand style and second-rate philosophizing, has none of that.” (The New York Times, 2019)

## **2. Causal attribution frame element:**

Risk attribution and Benefit attribution were both included in what was named a **Moral Consequences** frame, as the articles belonging to these categories refer to how the public perception of the movie constitutes either a moral risk factor or a benefit: “won’t this movie cause dummies to think the Joker is good? To ask the question is to argue that nuance is dangerous.” (The New York Times, Brooks 2019)

## **3. Moral evaluation frame element:**

Benefits: call to action and Risks: moral attributes fit into an **Ideology** frame, as the author’s point of view is informed by their ideological stance: “Joker isn’t an ode to the far right – it’s a warning against austerity.” (The Guardian, Uetricht 2019)

“If that feels a little too dangerous right now, maybe it’s a sign of how close to the edge we are.” (The Guardian, Rose 2019)

## **4. Treatment frame element:**

The two variables under this frame element, Judgement: Positive and Judgement: Negative focus on delivering solutions based on the film’s perceived message, whether positive or negative: “Maybe though, we’ve seen enough of disabled people depicted as pious martyrs, and it’s time the victims fought back. Not by shooting people, but with smart, anarchic direct action.” (The Guardian, Edgar 2019) This frame is thus named **Resolution**.

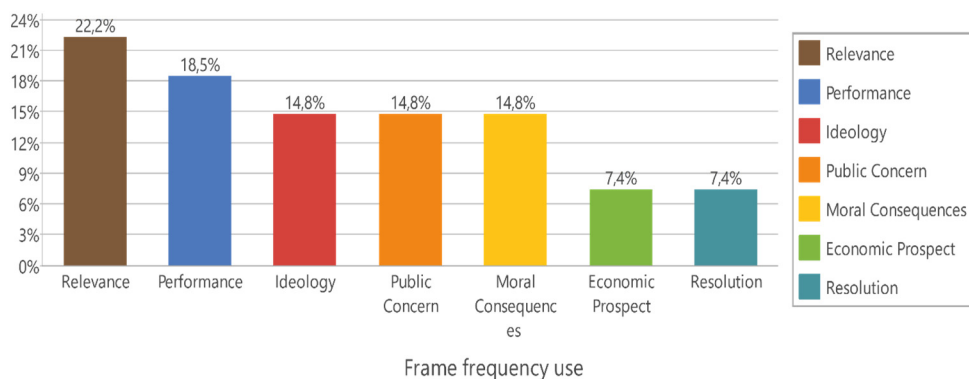
The frames were then coded into MaxQDA, in order to produce a comparative chart of frame use frequency with the sampled media outlets, as seen in fig. 4:

	New York Times	The Guardian
Resolution		20,0%
Ideology		40,0%
Moral Consequences	17,6%	10,0%
Economic Prospect	11,8%	
Performance	29,4%	
Public Concern	17,6%	10,0%
Relevance	23,5%	20,0%
# N = Documents	17 (60,7%)	11 (39,3%)

**Fig. 4:** Comparative Frame Use Frequency

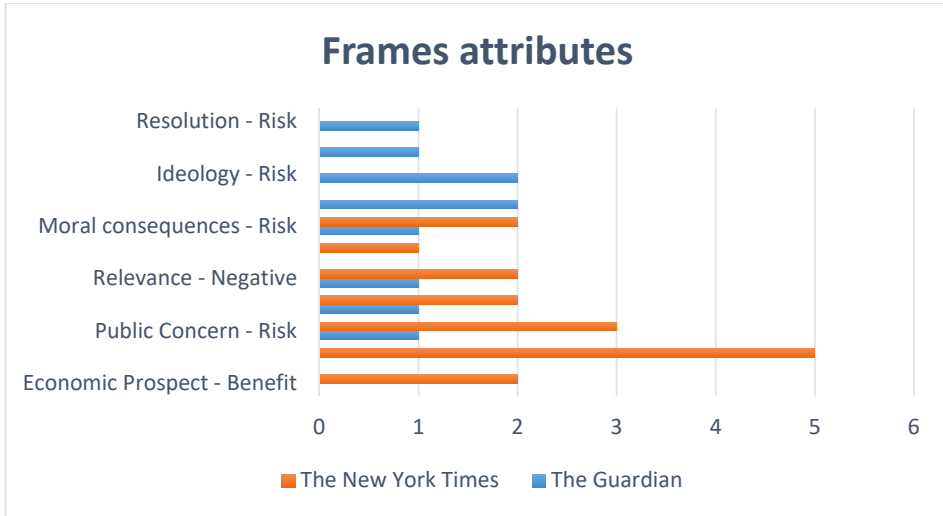
As can be observed in fig. 4, The New York Times did not use a Resolution frame or an Ideology frame for the published articles on the film *Joker*, while The Guardian used the Resolution frame in a 20% proportion and the Ideology frame, 40%. New York Times's most used frames are Performance (29.4 %) and Relevance (23.5%). While The Guardian did not use the Economic Prospect or the Performance frames at all, the Public Concern frame was also used in a 10% proportion and the Relevance frame, 20%.

Overall, the frames used the most were: Relevance (22.2%), Performance (18.5 %) and Ideology (14.8%), as can be observed in fig. 5:



**Fig. 5:** Frame frequency use





**Fig. 6:** Frames attributes

Considering Matthes and Kohring’s research design for determining news media frames (2008), all the identified frames can be divided into risk/benefit or positive/negative attributes, which is the next step in the analysis:

### 1. Economic Prospect:

The **Economic Prospect** frame focuses on the film’s earnings. There were no risk attributes identified for this category.

### 2. Performance:

This frame is a human interest frame that focuses on the actor’s performance from different angles. There were no risk or negative attributes identified for this category.

### 3. Public concern:

This frame only assumes a risk factor attribute: “Following concerns about the potential for violence, several chains will not allow face coverings or clothing that would make other guests feel uncomfortable” (Guardian 27.09) (Pulver 2019).

#### 4. Relevance:

This frame matches articles which display both negative and positive attributes: “To be worth arguing about, a movie must first of all be interesting [...] “Joker,” an empty, foggy exercise in second-hand style and second-rate philosophizing, has none of that.” (New York Times 03.10)

#### 5. Moral consequences:

The articles belonging to this category refer to how the public perception of the movie constitutes either a moral risk factor or a benefit.

#### 6. Ideology:

Since as the framing of articles belonging to this category is informed by different ideological discourse, this frame includes benefits and risks attributes.

#### 7. Resolution:

The two variables under this frame element, Benefit and Risk focus on delivering solutions based on the film’s perceived message, whether positive or negative.

Next, each positive/negative or risk/benefit attribute is recoded as hero/villain, as can be observed in fig. 7, followed by a comparative chart of the two media outlets, as can be seen in fig. 8:

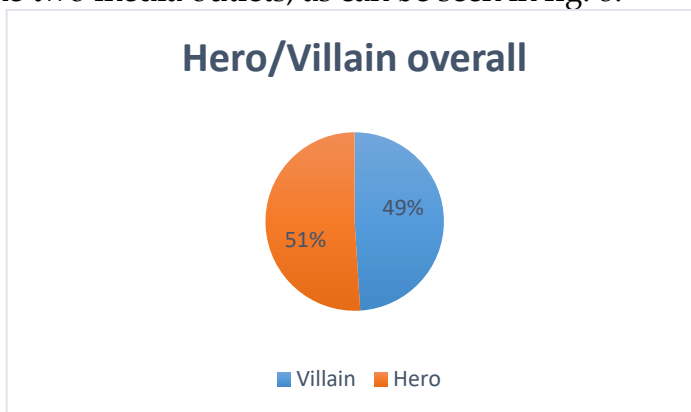
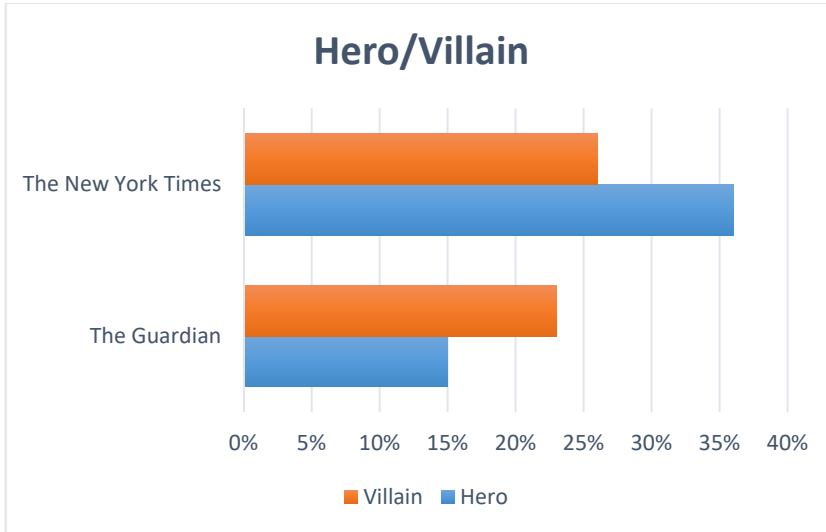


Fig. 7: Hero/villain overall



**Fig. 8: Hero/Villain Comparative Chart**

The quantification of data categories led to the following results:

Between the two media outlets, the hero/villain frames were used in almost the same proportion, with the hero frame being used 51% of the time, and the villain, 49%. However, The New York Times articles use a predominantly hero frame, while The Guardian donned more articles pertaining to the villain frame.

### **Discussion. Conclusion**

The unique patterns formed by frame elements or groups of frame elements, as defined by Entman (1993) can be interpreted as frames when using a research design that is meant to yield accurate results (Matthes and Kohring 2008). The methods used in this study combine manual coding and computerized analysis that resulted in determining these seven frames: Relevance, Performance, Ideology, Public Concern, Moral Consequences, Economic Prospect and Resolution. As suggested by Matthes and Kohring (2008, 275), “the crucial advantage [of these methods] is that frames are not subjectively determined but

empirically suggested by an inductive clustering method". The purpose of using this research design was the fact that it allows for observation of issues and frame changes throughout time, which would not be possible using a fully deductive method of analysis.

The resulting frames show the wide spectrum of approaches employed by journalists when covering a topic such as a popular culture film's release and its implications and effects. What the research revealed in terms of comparative analysis of identified frames is that, on one hand, The Guardian used a predominantly ideological and morally relevant angle. This indicates partisanship within this outlet's discourse. The importance of that is not to be ignored, since a political bias seems evident in the framing of the stories. The Joker as a symbol of chaos is being associated with "incels", Trump, Brexit, the act of protesting, the political left and the political right. The Resolution framing employed by The Guardian is applied to articles encouraging a "call to action" mindset.

On the other hand, The New York Times donned a less overall ideologically biased story framing, though it did partially focus on the moral implications of this film being seen and/or misunderstood, thus it focused on its relevancy. A notable difference in approach is the economical angle, as The New York Times brought attention to the business side of the movie industry, with a lot of talk of Box Office results, while The Guardian did not produce any economical related frames. This is justified by the former outlet's geographical location, within the same country that produced and released this film.

The frames identified in this study: Relevance, Performance, Ideology, Public Concern, Moral Consequences, Economic Prospect and Resolution served as this research's basic categories for further coding. The risk/benefit and positive/negative attributes, as applied to these categories, allowed for a link between the existent identified frames and the aforementioned study of the hero/villain myth in political communication.

As stated in literature review, the process of cognitive projection onto archetypal representations can describe how narratives at play might reinforce biases and perpetuate the internalization of certain

belief systems. In other words, we often suffer of confirmation bias, so we tend to believe that which matches our value systems, our needs or prejudices. This is often an unconscious choice, the purpose of which is avoiding the discomfort caused by experiencing cognitive dissonance. The root of those biases can be traced to what Jung calls the collective unconscious and our own personal unconscious, in the form of archetypes, which are inherited patterns of thinking or behaviour.

Considering archetypal representations permeate all aspects of culture, society and politics, it is perhaps noteworthy to consider how archetypes inform narratives such as myths and frames. This process of projection onto archetypal representations can describe how an individual has a positive or negative reaction when met with certain media discourse, but also how the news frames subconsciously reinforce biases and perpetuate systems of belief, beyond that which is easily noticeable.

Some of these archetypes, like the hero and the shadow (villain), play a crucial part in the natural development of self. When people are exposed to these stories of heroes' struggles, they unconsciously identify with them, which subliminally allows the ego to confront *the shadow*, which represents underdeveloped or repressed part of the subconscious. (Jung 1994). However, media discourse that is framed in terms of benefits/risks or hero/villain has the potential to polarize or confirm false beliefs. In other words, media constructs reality through framing devices. The hero/villain aspect of narratives can either challenge or perpetuate core values.

*Joker's* release caused tremendous controversy, and its emotionally triggering potential is reflected in news media discourse, as reflected in the finding that both hero and villain frames were used in equal proportion in the sampled articles. However, The New York Times donned a generally less politically biased account of the release of this film and the buzz around it, and used a predominantly positive – hero inclined frame to reporting, which can be justified by the outlet's strong ethical code and journalistic values. What the research revealed in terms of comparative analysis is that The Guardian used a predominantly ideological and morally relevant angle, and it tends to vilify the film.

The news media's polarized ways of approaching discourse that is related to an inevitably politically charged entertainment media product, *Joker*, is not only concerning, but also fascinating to observe and analyze. The different patterns of framing and construction of meaning revealed by this study can be applied when analyzing a wider set of data samples, which could also reveal more frames.

### **Limitations**

As stated in the methodology section, this research's sample characteristic is one of convenience, since only two media outlets were analyzed. The purpose of that was a focus on the research design rather than a thorough sampling. In order to determine a comprehensive account of all media frames that are relevant to this issue, at least six media outlets need to be analyzed. As a future completion of this project, an additional four outlets were selected based on location (European and American) and popularity: Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, BBC News and The Daily Telegraph.

Furthermore, this study raised additional questions related to the news media reporting of this film: how has *Joker* been used in the news media as a symbol of socio-political chaos throughout time? and how are the actors who played these characters being associated with *Joker* as a symbol of chaos?

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