

Covering inclusion: Frames, themes, and voice in news about LGBTI topics

Abstract

This article investigates how LGBTI topics are framed in the news and who is given a voice in this coverage by analysing the Dutch-speaking Belgian press. An inductive framing analysis and quantitative content analysis were applied on 1,570 articles about LGBTI topics published in 2021 by 13 Dutch-language news outlets. Seven inclusive and two exclusionary frames were discerned. The study shows that primarily gay men serve as voices of the LGBTI community. The findings also indicate that articles are more likely to be framed inclusively when they cite LGBTI people or organisations. Building on the politics of voice and the concepts of valuable and inclusive journalism, this paper argues for journalists and academics to focus on voices that remain unheard in journalism.

Keywords: content analysis, diversity, framing, sexual orientation, gender identity, newspapers, representation, inclusive journalism, Belgium

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Introduction

LGBTI¹ topics are ever-present in Western news media, in items about issues such as queer celebrities, homophobia, and pride parades. This sharp increase in news coverage (Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020; Moritz, 2010; Moscovitz, 2010) has raised questions about *how* LGBTI topics are represented in the press. In countries where LGBTI people have gained various rights, this media attention is often assumed to be inclusive. This requires more investigation, especially since the media can impact attitudes toward LGBTI rights (Calzo and Ward, 2009; Lee and Hicks, 2011, 2022).

Belgium provides an interesting context for studying media representations of LGBTI people. It is considered a ‘paradise’ for LGBTI rights because of its legal framework, with anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBTI people and the right for same-sex couples to get married, adopt children, or access in vitro fertilisation (Eeckhout and Paternotte, 2011). Since 2018, transgender people can change their gender and name without medical restrictions and in 2020, Belgium made international headlines with the first out transgender minister in Europe (Hugendubel, 2020). However, on the reverse of the medal, Belgium is among the European countries where LGBTI people report the most physical, sexual, and verbal abuse (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2020). Homophobic and transphobic prejudices remain widespread (Dierckx et al., 2017). This contrast between the legal framework and lived realities of LGBTI people calls for investigation into how LGBTI topics are represented in the news.

The journalistic coverage of LGBTI topics in countries with considerable legal LGBTI equality has been studied mainly in case studies (Kerrigan and Pramaggiore, 2021; Magrath et al., 2017; Verhoeven et al., 2023) or in large-scale studies based on deductive methods (Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020). This article contributes to the literature on inclusion and journalism by investigating the news coverage of LGBTI topics through an inductive framing analysis and a subsequent quantitative content analysis. This approach allows us to analyse a large set of data while still working with an analytical framework emerging from the data. Specifically, we ask which frames are present in news coverage of LGBTI topics. In this article, we argue that the politics of voice (Couldry, 2010) may benefit inclusive coverage. Therefore, we also investigate which LGBTI people or organisations are cited in these articles. To systematically analyse the frames in news about LGBTI topics, we adopt an inductive framing analysis following the approach of Van Gorp (2010), who argues that identified frames need to be deductively

¹ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex. This acronym was chosen for uniformity with organisations in Belgium (çavaria) and abroad (ILGA, UN).

validated through a content analysis. Therefore, we supplement our framing analysis with a quantitative content analysis in which we also code the themes and cited actors in the news. Consequently, this allows us to investigate the relationship between the identified frames and the themes as well as the citations of LGBTI actors.

Literature review

LGBTI representation in news media

Journalism has an influence on issues we consider important (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and on the beliefs we hold regarding LGBTI people (Calzo and Ward, 2009; Lee and Hicks, 2011, 2022). Even in times when social media have become more important in people's daily lives, traditional news media are able to retain their discursive power (Langer and Gruber, 2021). It is not surprising, then, that the body of research investigating LGBTI coverage in mainstream news has grown in recent years, mainly drawing on discourse or content analysis (Billard, 2016; Kerrigan and Pramaggiore, 2021; Oliveira-Araujo, 2022). Coverage of LGBTI topics has increased ever since the 1980s, when the AIDS pandemic began (Åkerlund, 2019; Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020; van den Berg and Marinus, 2017). However, scholars warn that more visibility does not always equal emancipating coverage, as it does not eliminate (covert) homophobia in the news (Lovelock, 2018).

Alongside discourse and content analysis, scholars have adopted framing analysis to investigate the tone and shape of news coverage of LGBTI topics. Schotel (2022) applied automated text analysis to more than 15,000 Dutch and German newspaper articles between 2009 and 2019 and a critical frame analysis to 600 of those articles. In her analysis, Schotel (2022) discerns human rights frames, homonationalist frames, religious or anti-gender ideology frames, and frames specific to transgender people and people with intersex variations. She argues that these frames are applied in different ways, depending on the national context. Jacobs and Meeusen (2020) investigated LGBTI representations in 464 Belgian news broadcasts between 1986 and 2017 based on five frames they deduced from earlier research: deviance, abnormality, religion, equal rights, and victimisation. They found that LGBTI topics were more often framed in terms of equal rights and victimisation in recent years and that the deviance and abnormality frames had decreased. However, research has shown that transgender people are still frequently framed as deviant, deceivers, or incomprehensible (Åkerlund, 2019; DeJong et al., 2021).

The studies by Schotel (2022) and Jacobs and Meeusen (2020) use a deductive approach to address the demand for more quantitative analyses of LGBTI media representations.

Deductive framing analyses are less time-consuming and allow for comparison with previous research, but they fall short in identifying more fine-grained patterns and issue-specific dynamics in framing (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). In this article, we apply an inductive framing analysis, which may uncover new frames that have been overlooked and not investigated to date.

Journalism and voice

The media can construct or reinforce the understanding of marginalised groups such as LGBTI people as social outsiders, as illustrated above, but they also have the power to critically engage with stereotypes. One way of doing so is by paying attention to the narratives of this group, which Couldry (2010) describes as ‘politics of voice’. He defines voice as a social process that is centred on communicating one’s life and experiences, and the acknowledgement of the uniqueness of each narrative. Voice does not only encompass speaking; listening and recognizing these narratives as important is equally essential to the concept. However, in the neoliberal society, the voice of marginalised groups remains undervalued and the voices featured in the media tend to be those that support the ruling ideologies (Couldry, 2010). When narratives remain hidden in the media, it can be labelled symbolic annihilation, a term used to describe the underrepresentation and marginalisation of certain groups of people (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 1978). As Gross (1991: 21) later formulated it: ‘representation in the mediated “reality” of mass culture is in itself power; certainly it is the case that non-representation maintains the powerless status of groups’.

Rather than leaving marginalised groups voiceless, journalists can listen to and amplify those voices. More diverse voices in a story allow audiences to engage with multiple perspectives and ideas, which could lead to more support for LGBTI rights (Lee and Hicks, 2022). Furthermore, audiences expect that journalism fulfils social functions in addition to its traditional ‘watchdog’ role. In her research on valuable journalism, Costera Meijer (2022: 241) found that news audiences want to ‘get recognition’ and ‘increase mutual understanding’. She argues that journalists should therefore provide varied representation, make diverse voices heard (Costera Meijer, 2010), and provide empowering, constructive, or hopeful coverage (Costera Meijer, 2022). One way of doing so is through *inclusive* journalism, which highlights the ways in which journalists can ‘address and respond to inequalities of unjust social structures’ (Rupar, 2017: 419). In this journalistic paradigm, it is argued that a diversity of voices is required to ensure more accurate journalism (Ford et al., 2020). Media are considered a way to increase mutual understanding through the representation of marginalised groups.

The literature shows that LGBTI voices are often not included in news about LGBTI topics, which means that cisgender and straight perspectives still dominate the coverage (DeJong et al., 2021; Moscovitz, 2010). In the American debate about same-sex marriage, roughly one in six sources was a same-sex couple, balanced between gay and lesbian couples (Moscovitz, 2010). However, internal diversity within the LGBTI community is not always adequately reflected. American research indicates that 7% of American adults self-identify as LGBT (Jones, 2022), with most LGBT respondents indicating being bisexual (57%), followed by gay (21%), lesbian (14%), and/or transgender (10%). In Flemish TV news, gay men speak in 34% of all stories about LGBTI topics, a number that drops to 15% for lesbians and to 5% for trans people (Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020). The study relied on information provided on sexual orientation and gender identity in the audio or visuals of news stories. Bisexuals were excluded from the analyses in that study as they had a voice in just 0.8% of the sample. This reflects ‘bisexual erasure’, the nonrepresentation of bisexual identities, for example by incorrectly labelling bisexual people as gay (Magrath et al., 2017). Similarly, transgender voices in the news remain scarce. When transgender people are heard, journalists tend to focus on trans women, leaving men and non-binary people out of the picture (Billard, 2016; Capuzza, 2014).

Data and methods

Research questions

Based on the literature, this article asks four research questions. Each of these questions is investigated on the article level. The first question considers how LGBTI topics are represented and asks: *Which frames are present in news coverage of LGBTI topics?*

This article also investigates the themes present in the news coverage. Research on LGBTI topics is often centred on lifestyle sections (Gibson, 2004), hate crimes (see Billard, 2016) or specific case studies (Kerrigan and Pramaggiore, 2021; Magrath et al., 2017). To investigate where LGBTI topics are discussed and when they appear in the news, the second question is: *Which themes are present in news coverage of LGBTI topics?*

Regarding the voice of LGBTI people in discussing LGBTI topics (Couldry, 2010), this article specifically looks at citations. The third research question asks: *Which LGBTI people or organisations are cited in articles covering LGBTI news?*

Finally, in this study we aim to investigate whether there is a relationship between the identified frames and the cited LGBTI actors and themes in the news. Therefore, the final research question is: *Do the frames in the news coverage of LGBTI topics correlate with the themes and citations of LGBTI actors?*

Methods

To answer the first research question, we adopted a framing analysis following the approach of Van Gorp (2010). News frames are ‘conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information’ (Neuman et al., 1992: 60). An inductive approach was applied as this allowed for new or less apparent frames to emerge. We worked with eleven coders, which offered the opportunity to discuss frames and manually code a considerable amount of data. In the first qualitative and inductive phase, a list of frames was determined. A smaller sample ($n = 330$) of the texts was read and subjected to open coding by the coders and the first author to identify framing devices and reasoning devices. Framing devices are manifest elements typical of a frame and include word choices, metaphors, and stereotypes. These devices need to be explicitly stated in a text. Reasoning devices refer to the logic underlying the frame, that is, ‘a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation’ (Entman, 1993: 52). During two meetings, the framing and reasoning devices were put together. All frames were listed in a frame matrix (Appendix A).

In the second phase of the framing analysis, a quantitative and deductive approach was adopted to indicate how many times a frame appeared. Each frame was translated into a dummy variable to measure whether a frame was present in an article or not. An article could be frameless or could contain one or more frames. When at least one frame was present, coders needed to decide which frame was dominant, i.e., which frame was most emphasised. This required more interpretation, and the coders received instructions to pay attention to frames present in the title, lead, and first paragraph of the article.

To answer the last two questions, we applied quantitative content analysis, which allows one to get a systematic overview of patterns within a large set of data, based on a predetermined codebook (Bryman, 2012). First, a coding book was developed. Variables included metadata (medium, date, article type and page number), theme (based on themes from the Flemish Electronic News Archive, nieuwsarchief.be), cited LGBTI people (similar to Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020) and LGBTI organisations, and which part of the LGBTI community was the focus of the article. Article type distinguished between news articles, interviews, reviews (articles discussing television, music, ...), and opinion pieces (including columns and editorials). The coding was done by the eleven coders who also composed the framing matrix and the coding book was pretested on a sample of 30 articles. Areas of disagreement were identified, operational definitions were revised, and several variables were simplified or removed. In the second test, intercoder reliability was performed on a sample of 157 articles,

10% of the corpus. For the framing variables, Krippendorff's alpha ranged from .73 to .91 with a mean of .81, indicating very good reliability. Krippendorff's alpha for other variables ranged from .79 to .99 with a mean of .88, indicating great reliability. The analysis was performed using the statistical software program SPSS.

Sample

The sample is drawn from Flemish media, since the media systems in Flanders and the French Community are almost wholly separate and use different languages (Picone, 2022). French-speaking media were not included in this study due to different legal and social contexts, and coders were fluent only in Dutch. Six newspapers were selected, with four Flemish newspapers that are considered 'national' due to their wide circulation (*De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, and *Het Nieuwsblad*) and two regional newspapers (*Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Belang van Limburg*), as scholars have called for more analysis of regional media (Billard, 2016; Oliveira-Araujo, 2022). The search also included their sports sections and weekend magazines. Six magazines were added because of their varying focus on news stories (*Knack*), media (*Humo*), lifestyle (*Libelle*, *Flair*) and celebrities (*Story*, *Dag Allemaal*). The Flemish public broadcaster was added through its news website *VRT NWS*. With this selection, we included all major Flemish media companies with print titles. For further analyses, these media were divided into quality media (*De Morgen*, *De Standaard*, *Humo*, *Knack*, *VRT NWS*) and popular media (remaining titles).

Articles published between 1 January and 31 December 2021 were collected through the Belgian news archive GoPress, based on an extensive list of search words related to LGBTI people and topics. This search yielded 4,534 articles. Articles that did not meet one of the two following criteria were excluded: (1) a term related to LGBTI was present in the title, lead, or first paragraph of the article, or (2) at least one full paragraph was related to an LGBTI person or topic. This reduced the number of articles that mentioned LGBTI in passing to ensure that the corpus was sufficiently LGBTI-related. The final selection comprised 1,570 articles.

Findings

The results section is largely structured according to the research questions. First, we answer which frames were present (RQ1), by discussing the quantitative results and elaborating on the inductively identified frames. Afterwards, we list which themes were found in the news coverage (RQ2) and how this relates to the frames (RQ4). Finally, we conclude this section

with a quantitative overview of cited LGBTI people and organisations (RQ3), once again investigating the correlation with the frames (RQ4).

Frames

Approximately one in seven articles (14.5%) was frameless, meaning none of the inductively identified frames discussed below were applicable to the story. Most articles included one frame (42.7%) or two frames (30.3%). In 10.6% of the articles, three frames were identified, and to a much lesser extent one article could include four (1.7%) or five frames (0.3%). Table 1 lists how often each frame was present in the sample, overall and as the dominant frame. This table is divided into quality media and popular media, as there are notable differences between the two.

Frames were labelled inclusive or exclusionary. Important to note is that ‘inclusive’ refers to ‘inclusive of LGBTI people’ but can still exclude other marginalised groups. Some of these frames portrayed LGBTI people as an in-group by being exclusionary to other groups, which is reflected upon in the discussion of each frame. The inclusive frames are discussed before moving on to the exclusionary ones, each from most frequent to least frequent. An example is given for each frame, but it should be noted that these illustrate rather than epitomise the frame, as each frame has a wide internal variety.

Table 1.*Overview of frames per medium type, in %.*

Frame	Full sample (N = 1,570)		Popular media (n = 869)		Quality media (n = 701)	
	Overall presence	Dominant frame	Overall presence	Dominant frame	Overall presence	Dominant frame
Inclusive	82.4	79.2	83.3	81.3	81.2	76.7
Victim	29.0	18.0	29.1	18.1	28.8	18.0
Visibility	28.9	20.8	35.8	26.5	20.4	13.8
Acceptance	27.5	15.7	29.6	17.1	25.0	13.8
Homonationalist	16.7	10.6	11.6	6.7	23.0	15.5
Internal battle	10.9	6.6	11.6	7.0	10.0	6.0
Homophobic religion	9.6	5.2	7.5	4.0	12.1	6.6
Homophobic politics	4.6	2.4	3.2	1.8	6.4	3.0
Exclusionary	15.4	6.3	11.6	4.1	20.0	9.0
Deviance	12.6	4.6	9.9	3.1	16.0	6.4
Dogmatic	3.3	1.7	2.0	1.0	5.0	2.6
No frame	14.5		14.6		14.3	

Note: the percentages for ‘overall presence’ do not add up to 100% as a single article could contain multiple frames.

The *victim* frame (29% overall, 18% dominant) portrayed LGBTI people as victims of discrimination as well as verbal and physical violence. This frame is considered inclusive as the moral evaluation of this frame condemned said discrimination. In March, a gay man was murdered, leading to extensive media coverage of homosexuality and homophobia (Verhoeven et al., 2023). Consequently, almost a third (32%) of all articles with a victim frame were published in March, such as the following example:

L. was targeted by two slightly older boys from her school. They could not accept her sexual orientation. ‘They yelled “dirty lesbian” when I passed, daily. At first, I ignored it, but it got worse and worse.’ (*Het Laatste Nieuws*, 10 March 2021)²

² All quotes are translated from Dutch by the authors.

The *visibility* frame (29% overall, 21% dominant) emphasised the need for more LGBTI visibility through the presence of role models, media attention, and symbols in public space. The logic of the frame was that being ‘out there’ is central to LGBTI acceptance. The rainbow flag as a symbol for the LGBTI community was one of the most common framing devices for visibility. This frame was found more in popular media (36% overall) than quality media (20% overall). One example from an article about regional politics:

A rainbow crosswalk is an ordinary crosswalk in which the black parts are painted in the colours of the rainbow. This draws attention to the struggle for diversity and inclusion that the LGBTQI+ movement still faces daily. (*Het Laatste Nieuws*, 27 December 2021)

The *acceptance* frame (27% overall, 16% dominant) was present in news that was explicitly accepting of LGBTI topics and people. This ranged from formal acceptance (e.g., anti-discrimination measures) to personal stories (e.g., parents accepting their LGBTI child). Examples include well-known slogans such as ‘everyone is equal’ and ‘love is love’:

Love is love and we fully support that. Everyone has the right to be themselves. Feeling free in your neighbourhood being able to walk hand in hand with your lover in public is a basic right. (*Het Nieuwsblad*, 17 May 2021)

The *homonationalist* frame (17% overall, 11% dominant) was operationalised as a focus on LGBTI-phobia attributed to migrants or situated in foreign countries (see also Schotel, 2022). In doing so, this frame posited the own nation as LGBTI-friendly, thus obfuscating domestic discrimination against LGBTI people. Most articles in this frame referred to the law prohibiting ‘promotion of homosexuality’ in Hungary. There was a surge in the use of this frame when the law was passed; 42% of the 262 articles in which this frame was present were published in June and 17% in July. Quality media used this frame more (23% overall) than popular media (12% overall). This frame is inclusive of LGBTI people, but may stigmatise people with a migration background or specific national groups. The following example refers to homophobic comments made at the cost of the national basketball team:

The basketball girls should have a laugh about [the homophobic comments]. Besides, some of them earn their money in teams in Turkey and Russia, not exactly countries that excel in terms of LGB rights. But I have never heard them address that. The feeling of being offended here in this country is hypocritical. (*De Morgen*, 17 August 2021)

The *internal battle* frame (11% overall, 7% dominant) centred LGBTI people, describing their experiences before coming out of the closet. A common metaphor was wrestling with one's sexuality or gender identity. The frame centred personal experiences, not the broader heteronormative context that could power these insecurities. When telling these stories, the focus was often on the relief of finally being out and 'being yourself'. A politician from the radical right political party Vlaams Belang who came out as gay narrated it as follows:

For a very long time, I struggled with my sexual orientation. I deliberately ignored it. There were relationships with men, but always in secret. No one can sustain that. So I focused on other things, did not talk about it, and barely even thought about it. (*Het Belang van Limburg*, 18 December 2021)

The *homophobic religion* frame (10% overall, 5% dominant) bore many similarities to the homonationalist frame. Here, the presumed cause of homophobia was rooted in religion, with references to Christianity and Islam in the Belgian context. Religion and being religious were viewed as incompatible with supporting or being LGBTI. Although this frame is considered inclusive, it often portrays Christians or Muslims as homophobic others.

I am extremely disappointed in the Church. It is appalling that they call homosexuality a sin. I am disgusted by all the deviant and extremely reprehensible views the Church has sent into the world. (*Story*, 13 April 2021)

Similar to the previous frame, the *homophobic politics* frame (5% overall, 2% dominant) pointed to politicians as spreaders of LGBTI-phobia. In the Belgian context, this applied specifically to (radical) right-wing politicians, mainly those of Vlaams Belang. This frame is considered inclusive of LGBTI people because of the rejection of political homophobia.

Aversion to homosexuality and outright LGBTQ hatred are once again common among the radical right. Also with Vlaams Belang. Of course, the party leadership would like to portray a different image. (*De Morgen*, 15 March 2021)

Moving on to the exclusionary frames, the *deviance* frame depicted being LGBTI as a threat to 'normality', as unnatural and immoral. One of the arguments in this frame is that LGBTI people and topics will corrupt children. As shown in Table 1, the frame was present in 13% of the sample but was only dominant in 5%, indicating that this frame was frequently refuted by the press. The frame could be present when an article cited someone LGBTI-phobic

whilst rejecting said LGBTI-phobia. This frame was used more in quality media (16% overall) than popular media (10% overall). The following quotations are derived from a profile of a homophobic candidate for a cultural board position:

The public service broadcaster confronts children ‘with all kinds of aberrant forms of sexuality, topped with a bawdy homophile and militant sauce’ (...) ‘Promoting transgenderism is a disease that affects the brain. Transsexuality is abnormal.’ (*De Standaard*, 13 March 2021)

The *dogmatic* frame (3% overall, 2% dominant) was present in news that depicted LGBTI people as a group with excessive demands and as hypocritically intolerant of people who did not follow a so-called rainbow ideology. In a sort of post-gay understanding, this frame suggested that all LGBTI rights were won and that every new demand from LGBTI activists was too much. It was linked to general criticisms of social justice, sometimes lumped together under the terms ‘woke’ or ‘cancel culture’. The following example illustrates the dystopic image of this frame:

I only said that trans women are different from women who were born as women. This seems obvious to me. Apparently, I clashed with the orthodox discourse of American left-liberalism, which claimed a certain jargon and who doesn’t follow it, is censored. Language becomes moralised and thinking for oneself is no longer allowed. (*De Morgen*, 30 January 2021)

After identifying the frames, we explored whether these correlated with other aspects of the articles. Chi-square independence tests were performed to examine the relations between the presence of inclusion or exclusionary frames and other variables. For these tests, frameless articles were removed from the data, leaving 1,343 articles. When discussing inclusive and exclusionary frames, we will focus only on the dominant frame, as one article could contain both inclusive and exclusionary frames. For example, as mentioned when describing the deviance frame, exclusionary frames may have been countered by inclusive counterparts in the same article. By focusing on the dominant frame, each article with a frame was coded as inclusive or exclusionary. In general, 79.2% of all articles (N = 1,570) had an inclusive dominant frame, 6.3% had an exclusionary dominant frame and 14.5% were frameless.

As can be observed in Table 1, quality media were more likely to frame LGBTI topics in an exclusionary way than their popular counterparts ($\chi^2(1, N = 1,343) = 15.418, p < .001$). This can partly be explained by the fact that quality media published more opinion pieces and reviews, which were more often framed negatively (see Table 2). Another explanation is that

popular media published more regional news that was framed inclusively, as will be discussed in the following section about themes.

Table 2.

Overview of frames by article type, in %.

Frame	News article (n = 1,028)	Interview (n = 261)	Opinion piece (n = 233)	Review (n = 48)
Inclusive	82.0	75.5	73.8	66.7
Exclusionary	5.0	7.7	9.4	12.5
No frame	13.0	16.8	16.8	20.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Themes

This analysis did not only consider frames, but also in relation to which themes LGBTI topics were discussed and whether this was correlated with inclusive or exclusionary frames. Whereas the frames describe the shape of the news coverage or *how* a story is reported, the themes describe the subject of the articles, or *what* is reported. Table 3 provides an overview of all themes and their frames. Thematically, we distinguish between national politics on the Belgian and Flemish level as they impact almost all readers of Dutch-speaking news media, and regional politics on the level of provinces and cities.

One in four articles (25.0%) related to LGBTI was classified as human interest and celebrity news. Previous research has already indicated that LGBTI topics are more often represented in ‘soft news’ (Capuzza, 2014). The second most common theme was crime and justice (16%). This was in part influenced by the murder of a gay man in March.

Table 3.

Overview of dominant frames by themes, in %. N for each theme is given between brackets.

	Human interest and celeb (309)	Crime and justice (250)	Culture (219)	Foreign affairs (157)	Sports (138)	Regional politics (133)	National politics (115)	Pride and IDAHOT (96)	Religion (82)	Other (71)	Total (1,570)
Inclusive	73.1	78.0	68.5	91.7	72.5	92.5	77.4	96.9	96.3	57.7	79.2
Exclusionary	8.4	7.6	11.0	5.1	4.3	0.8	7.8	1.0	0.0	12.7	6.3
No frame	18.5	14.4	20.5	3.2	23.2	6.7	14.8	2.1	3.7	29.6	14.6

The themes in the coverage of LGBTI topics and people were significantly related to whether the dominant frame was inclusive or exclusionary ($\chi^2 (9, N = 1,343) = 40.022, p < .001$). For these tests, frameless articles were excluded again. As can be seen in Table 3, news about regional politics was more frequently framed inclusively ($\chi^2 (1, N = 1,343) = 8.623, p = .003$). More specifically, half of the articles with the visibility frame (50.4%) were coded as regionally themed. This also explains why the visibility frame is so strongly present in popular media, as 90.2% of all regional articles appeared in popular media. Other themes that were more likely to be framed inclusively were religion ($\chi^2 (1, N = 1,343) = 6.680, p = .010$) and Pride and IDAHOT, the International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia ($\chi^2 (1, N = 1,343) = 5.890, p = .015$). Articles on a cultural theme ($\chi^2 (1, N = 1,343) = 8.137, p = .004$) were more likely to have an exclusionary frame. Possible explanations are explored in the discussion section. The relationship between frames and other themes was not significant.

Cited actors

The final part of this study considered actors in the coverage of LGBTI topics. In more than 40% of the articles, at least one LGBTI person or organisation was cited. Table 4 provides an overview of how many articles cited each demographic within the LGBTI community. Several groups could be cited in one article, or one person could be part of two groups (e.g., a trans woman and lesbian). Therefore, the total number of articles citing LGBTI people and/or organisations is lower than the sum of the separate groups combined. The same is true for the overarching categories ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘transgender’, as one article could cite, for example, a trans man *and* a non-binary person.

Table 4.

Number of articles citing LGBTI people and organisations, in %.

	Full sample (N = 1,570)	Articles on sexual orientation (N = 710)	Articles on transgender topics (N = 211)	Articles on broader LGBTI topics (N = 386)
LGBTI people	34.2	39.2	49.8	17.4
Sexual orientation	28.4	38.7	14.2	15.8
Gay	20.7	31.1	6.6	13.2
Lesbian	6.1	6.6	6.6	2.6
Bisexual	2.1	2.1	1.4	0.5
Transgender	7.6	1.0	46.0	1.8
Trans woman	3.7	0.7	22.3	1.0
Trans man	2.3	0.1	16.1	0.5
Non-binary	2.0	0.7	9.5	0.3
Intersex	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
LGBTI organisation	11.7	12.4	5.7	19.9
At least one LGBTI person and/or organisation	42.5	47.9	53.6	31.3

The data show that, in line with previous research, gay men were most frequently cited in the news coverage of LGBTI topics, in 20.7% of the articles. They were cited three times more than the second most cited group, lesbian women (6.1%). Bisexuals were cited in 2.1% of the articles. Although transgender people were cited less often than LGB people, they were not absent from the news coverage. Trans women were cited in more articles than trans men and non-binary people, while intersex people were rarely present in the coverage.

Articles were coded for which aspect of LGBTI they focused on: sexual orientation (45.2%), transgender topics (13.4%), or broader LGBTI topics without elaborating on sexual orientation or transgender topics (24.6%). A fourth possibility was that articles did not focus on LGBTI topics but were still included in the sample as they covered LGBTI people (16.3%). Table 4 also provides an overview of who was cited in articles on each topic. Not included in the table are articles that focus on intersex topics (0.5%) because they were extremely limited.

Of the eight articles that focused on intersex topics, two cited an intersex person. Transgender people are cited in 7.6% of all articles, which increases notably when articles are about transgender topics: in almost half of those articles (46.0%), at least one trans person was cited. Further investigation showed that 51.3% of all citations of transgender people occurred in relation to the themes human interest and celebrity. LGBTI organisations were cited in one out of five articles (19.9%) on broader LGBTI topics. An explanation is that articles on broader LGBTI topics covered themes such as pride and IDAHOT (21.0%), regional politics (21.0%), foreign affairs (14.5%), and sports (11.0%). Articles were more likely to have an inclusive dominant frame if they cited at least one LGBTI organisation or person ($\chi^2 (1, N = 1,343) = 8.317, p = .004$).

Discussion and conclusion

This article investigated the news coverage of LGBTI topics and the frames (RQ1), themes (RQ2), and cited LGBTI people and organisations (RQ3) within it through framing and content analysis. Moreover, we tested whether there was a correlation between frames and themes on the one hand, and frames and cited LGBTI actors on the other hand (RQ4).

Regarding RQ1 on *frames*, nine frames were inductively discerned within the data. This research has shown that Flemish news outlets generally frame LGBTI topics in an inclusive manner; 79% of all articles had an inclusive dominant frame, 6% an exclusionary one and 15% were frameless. Five frames were also identified in other framing analyses on LGBTI topics, namely victim, acceptance, homonationalist, deviance, and homophobic religion (Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020; Schotel, 2022). Four other frames were not included in previous research: visibility, internal battle, homophobic politics, and dogmatic, which confirms the added value of our initial qualitative and inductive analysis. While most of the frames were inclusive, two were considered exclusionary, deviance and dogmatic. Since LGBTI topics were widely covered in the period we studied, and four out of five articles were framed inclusively, it appears as if Flemish news has transcended the stage of symbolic annihilation (Gerbner and Gross, 1976) and marginalisation. However, one out of five articles were still exclusionary and based on our inductive analysis we identified an exclusionary frame that was not discussed in previous research, 'dogmatic'. Therefore, we argue that critical perspectives remain necessary in seemingly progressive or inclusive contexts, as inclusion is never complete and may give rise to backlash, which becomes apparent here in the 'dogmatic' frame.

The other newly identified frames also provide additional insights in contemporary narratives about LGBTI topics. The 'visibility' frame, for one, has been incorporated in the

acceptance frame in other analyses, but we argue that it is important to distinguish both. More visibility may increase LGBTI acceptance (Lee and Hicks, 2011, 2022), but solely relying on visibility may depoliticise LGBTI issues. It is crucial that in addition to increasing visibility, other solutions are featured in the news. We also consider 'internal battle' a separate frame that should not be conflated with the victim frame. While they share common starting points such as LGBTI-phobia, the focus in the internal battle frame lies on overcoming adversity and coming out. Moreover, this frame highlights the workings of the politics of voice (Couldry, 2010) as it centres and values LGBTI narratives. 'Homophobic politics', in turn, is likely to be situated under homophobic religion or homonationalism in other analyses. Considering the rise of political homophobia (Weiss and Bosia, 2013), we argue that these labels are not precise enough. The same logic explains why the 'dogmatic' frame was not considered part of the deviance frame. Both frames may represent being LGBTI as excessive, but the dogmatic frame adds a layer as it represents LGBTI people as intolerant and oppressive in a 'culture war' discourse. Inductively identifying frames specific to LGBTI topics allowed this research to provide these new insights, although it also makes it difficult to compare or generalise the findings (de Vreese, 2005).

The findings about *themes* (RQ2) indicated that almost half of the articles on LGBTI topics were related to one of three themes: human interest and celebrities, crime and justice, and culture. The large number of articles on culture, human interest and celebrities confirms that most of the news about LGBTI topics appears in so-called 'soft' news (Capuzza, 2014). This is especially true for transgender topics, which often cover more personal stories, given that half of these articles were based on the theme of human interest and celebrity. Furthermore, in the context of RQ4, regionally themed articles were overwhelmingly inclusive, which we argue is a reason to include these items in analyses. The inclusive nature of regional news was partly due to the visibility frame, as it featured many pieces about local initiatives such as rainbow crossroads. However, despite the predominantly inclusive framing in the entire sample, much of the news about LGBTI topics is generally problem-oriented and marked by an emphasis on negativity, as indicated by the dominance of the crime theme and the victim frame. This is no exception as news media tend to favour bad news over other stories (Harcup and O'Neill, 2017). The large number of crime-related articles is in part due to the murder of a gay man in March and thus incident-based. Although this murder has caused a spike, LGBTI-phobic violence would also occur and be reported on in any other year. Only one theme was significantly related to exclusionary framing, namely culture. This can be explained by the nomination of an LGBTI-phobic candidate for the board of a cultural organisation, and because

reviews were coded as ‘culture’. Within article type, reviews had the biggest share of exclusionary framing as these often very brief articles used catchy titles such as ‘pray the gay away’ and sometimes (inadvertently) foregrounded the LGBTI-phobia the reviewed content wanted to uncover.

Reviewing RQ 1 and 2, the distinct patterns of dominant frames and themes we identified provide evidence of journalistic routines in storytelling and the similarities in reporting about certain topics. In her research about homelessness in the press, Schneider (2012) discussed that journalists and editors tend to have an angle for a story prior to contacting sources. Interviewees are then placed into certain positions or even selected based on what they will possibly say to fit a certain narrative. In constantly viewing LGBTI topics in the same contexts (themes) and in the same narratives (frames), these images are not only strengthened in the minds of the news audience, but in those of the news producers as well. Consequently, these dominant patterns are constantly reinforced.

The findings about *voice* in news about LGBTI topics (RQ3) show that journalists include LGBTI actors, either individuals or organisations, in four out of ten articles. This study emphasises that there is work to be done to provide a more balanced inclusion of voices in journalism. In line with previous research (Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020; Moritz, 2010), this research has shown that mostly gay men were given a voice. While the general percentage of cited LGBTI actors seems high, the coverage is dominated by the voices and corresponding narratives from one group. The data thus show that symbolic annihilation in terms of underrepresentation remains present in LGBTI-related news coverage for other groups under the LGBTI umbrella. Articles on transgender themes cite mostly trans women, to a lesser extent on trans men and leave non-binary people with very little voice in the media (Billard, 2016; Capuzza, 2014; Schotel, 2022). Intersex people and topics are barely represented. Bisexual people were rarely cited, which indicates bisexual erasure in the press, in line with earlier research on the topic (Magrath et al., 2017). However, much like previous research on LGBTI voices in the news (Jacobs and Meeusen, 2020), this research could not avoid bisexual erasure in its design, as it relied on labels and descriptions used in the news coverage. Therefore, it is probable that some bisexuals were mistakenly coded as lesbian or gay if the articles did not mention bisexuality or attraction to more than one gender. This indicates a limitation of this study. While the methodology has proven useful in discovering large-scale trends, future research should apply a qualitative methodology on LGBTI representation in journalism to grasp the nuances that were missed by this quantitative approach. Moreover, this research only

focused on cited LGBTI actors. Future quantitative research could investigate whether there is a difference in news coverage when non-LGBTI cited actors are included.

Finally, on a positive note, the findings for RQ4 suggest that the cited actors present in the coverage are important as they may influence how news is framed and which narratives are shared. The results indicate that when LGBTI people or organisations are cited, the article is more likely to be framed inclusively. These findings suggest that framing can improve when marginalised groups are given a voice, highlighting the value of inclusive journalism (Rupar, 2017). Furthermore, in line with the politics of voice (Couldry, 2010) and valuable journalism (Costera Meijer, 2022), this inclusivity indicates that the voices of LGBTI people were not only audible, but also *listened to* by the media. Their narratives are considered important and newsworthy. These findings empirically contribute to the theory of voice by underlining the importance of including actors that are part of the covered marginalised community. However, as became clear through the frequency of the victim or visibility frame, these narratives can also become simplified to remain palatable to a broad audience. As bisexual, non-binary, and intersex people were cited less often, this means that certain frames and narratives remain unheard. The opportunity for journalists and academics alike lies in meeting this need for recognition and strengthening these voices.

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Appendix A.

Frame matrix

	REASONING DEVICES				FRAMING DEVICES	
Frame	Problem definition: LGBTI people...	Causal interpretation	Solution	Moral evaluation		Examples
Acceptance	... are (or should be) accepted, tolerated, and legally protected.	Times have changed, LGBTI is now in the mainstream and everyone accepts or should accept LGBTI equalities.	The (legal) battle for LGBTI equalities must continue.	LGBTI people should be tolerated, supported, and celebrated.	Acceptance, tolerance, everyone should be able to be themselves, same-sex marriage, battling discrimination, legal register, mention of homophobia or transphobia alongside racism, sexism. Time indicators: words such as 'finally', comparisons with 'earlier'	'I think it says more about the previous generations, how they didn't have the courage to out themselves. In the current zeitgeist, young people have much less trouble with this.' 'Everyone is equal regardless of your skin color, religion or sexual preference.'
Visibility	... are (or should be) visible in society, the media and in public places, which benefits (self-) acceptance.	There are many LGBTI role models, and coming out is essential to embracing LGBTI equalities.	Visibility must be amplified, being 'out there' is the way to move forward with accepting LGBTI.	Visibility is a way to show support for LGBTI people and opposes discrimination.	References to rainbows on flags, crosswalks, or anywhere in public space. Coming-out, prides, role models that 'pave the way'.	'The different [transgender] role models – such as singer Sam Bettens – who openly share their transition contribute to breaking the taboo.' 'By painting the colors of the rainbow flag on the road, we clearly call attention to diversity and acceptance regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.'

Internal battle	... struggle to accept themselves in a predominantly cisgender and heterosexual society.	Heteronormative ideas and expectations about sexuality and gender identity keep LGBTI people from coming out. These ideas can, but do not need to be made explicit by their environment and can also stem from LGBTI people themselves.	This (perceived) intolerance strains LGBTI people until they accept their sexuality and gender identity, after which they are freed from their fears.	People should feel pity and compassion for LGBTI people due to the struggles they endure before coming out, and share the relief when they can be 'out and proud'.	Metaphors of battle ('wrestling' with one's sexuality or identity, battling with oneself) and displacement (feeling left out, isolated, coming forward with something), repressing one's sexuality. Internalised negative experiences related to being LGBTI.	'Although I had friends, I felt very lonely. I did not become less gay – on the contrary. I started looking for ways to express myself and I realised that I did not need to adhere to gender roles in clothing stores or that I could paint my nails, for example.' 'My adolescence was a drama. I remember standing in the shower and looking at my incipient breasts and crying. I tried to look in the mirror as little as possible. I hated my feminine hips, my monthly periods, my high-pitched voice.'
Victim	... are often victims of discrimination and violence, be it physical or verbal.	Society is intolerant of LGBTI people and people who support LGBTI equality.	Violence against LGBTI people should be stopped by raising awareness and introducing easier ways to report homophobic and transphobic violence.	It is puzzling that many LGBTI people face violence and everyone should sympathise with their victimhood.	Exclusion, risk of losing a job, negative things attributed <i>because</i> someone is LGBTI. LGBTI-phobia, being targeted, slurs, verbal and physical abuse.	'The gay movement in Sint-Niklaas and the surrounding area is very scared. "It is not the first time that gays have been victims of violence. This frightens us."' 'I have been a victim of homophobia several times. Who among us hasn't?'

Homophobic politics	... are scapegoats for politicians. Right-wing domestic political parties are portrayed as homophobic or transphobic.	Politicians recuperate LGBTI equality to further their agenda but are not seeking to improve situations for LGBTI people.	Until right-wing politicians make clear supportive statements about LGBTI equality, they will be regarded as opposing said equality.	Those who support LGBTI rights should distance themselves from right-wing parties.	References to political gain, hypocrisy, two-facedness. Attribution of blame to political parties.	‘Let it be clear once and for all: [radical right] parties and movements are essentially homophobic and are <i>not</i> allies of LGBTs.’ ‘When you see some politicians flirting with homophobia – just about every member from Vlaams Belang – it is my duty to confront them with it.’
Homophobic religion	... are incompatible with religion, as religious institutions continually attack LGBTI equalities.	Religion is focused on heteronormative family values such as marriage and children, and LGBTI equalities threaten these values.	Religious institutions should ‘catch up’ and accept LGBTI equality, until then they will be judged and regarded as backward.	Religion is considered intolerant, bad, exclusive, hypocritical, and incompatible with values in the 21 st century. This spills over into intolerance towards religious people.	LGBTI is described as a sin, evil, a virus. Us-them dichotomy: atheist versus religious people, religious people versus LGBTI people, LGBTI-friendly community versus religious community.	‘Homosexuality remains an “incongruity” for the Vatican. Even the blessing of the commitment of a homosexual couple is not yet possible.’ ‘I grew up in a Muslim family and wore a headscarf as a child. Homosexuality was taboo; the norm was to marry a man and have children.’
Homo-nationalist	... are only accepted in ‘Western’ countries, homophobia is fully situated outside the borders of the nation.	Foreign countries are lagging and more conservative.	Policies in LGBTI-phobic countries should be condemned and there should be sanctions from (Western) Europe to	It is disappointing and troubling that foreign countries are behind regarding LGBTI equality, yet it strengthens pride in the tolerant culture.	LGBTI-free zones, using names of countries as synonymous with homophobia (Poland, Hungary, ‘Africa’), dichotomy between LGBTI-friendly domestic country	[Referring to homophobia] ‘Otherwise you’re just handling things the Hungarian way.’ ‘On the “rainbow index”, Belgium is at the very

			impose LGBTI-friendly values.		and LGBTI-phobic foreign country.	top in second place. You can't imagine it here, but worldwide there are still 68 countries where homosexuality is punishable.'
Deviance	... are not normal because they go against tradition or nature and sexual orientation/gender identity should be kept for oneself. It is inappropriate for children.	LGBTI people deviate from the norms regarding sexuality and gender. They are represented through reductive stereotypes, considered a bad and potential harmful influence, especially for families and children.	LGBTI must remain separate from 'normal' sexuality and gender expressions. Solutions include one-dimensional representation or nonrepresentation, not educating children about LGBTI issues, and limiting visibility for LGBTI issues.	LGBTI people are helpless over their sexuality or gender identity but should be avoided lest they 'spread' their deviancy.	Dirty, extravagant, taboo, perverted, disturbed, unnatural, underlining difference, disease, sin, gay men as 'not real men'... Traditional family values, protection, contrasting with 'normal' family situations or gender identities, 'confronting' children with LGBTI.	'I think gay pride is really dirty. That exhibitionism on those shit carts, with their stuff in a jockstrap...' 'Faggots are the reason that fewer white babies are born, that's not normal. And they're all paedophiles.'
Dogmatic	... are part of a hype that is overly present and demanding. LGBTI people impose their beliefs and are intolerant of those who do not confirm to them.	LGBTI people are tyrannical towards people who are cisgender and heterosexual and aim to erase 'biological' differences, as they magnify gender and sexuality to the point of being ridiculous.	LGBTI people should be calmer, not be offended so quickly and assimilate to heterosexual standards. Society should pay less attention to LGBTI people and topics.	Annoyed and impatience towards the whims and absurd demands of LGBTI people.	Hype, trend, (LGBTI people are) thinking in boxes, woke, 'all the letters' in LGBTQIA(bcd...), whining, asking too much, terms such as 'indoctrination', culture war discourse.	'But that [LGBTI] movement also has an ugly side: It is a tyrannical, dictatorial world in which they also think in boxes. It suffices to make a mistake about someone's gender, and oh-la-la, it becomes a drama out of all proportion.' [About safe spaces] 'And so the wokers and those who care about the wokers hold each other hostage in an endless

						stream of mutual recriminations and non- constructive media bickering.'
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