

Framing

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A frame in social theory consists of a schema of interpretation -- that is, a collection of anecdotes and stereotypes--that individuals rely on to understand and respond to events. In simpler terms, people build a series of mental filters through biological and cultural influences. They use these filters to make sense of the world. The choices they then make are influenced by their creation of a frame. Framing is also a key component of sociology, the study of social interaction among humans.

To clarify: When one seeks to explain an event, the understanding often depends on the frame referred to. If a friend rapidly closes and opens an eye, we will respond very differently depending on whether we attribute this to a purely "physical" frame (s/he blinked) or to a social frame (s/he winked).

Though the former might result from a speck of dust (resulting in an involuntary and not particularly meaningful reaction), the latter would imply a voluntary and meaningful action (to convey humor to an accomplice, for example). Observers will read events seen as purely physical or within a frame of "nature" differently than those seen as occurring with social frames. But we do not look at an event and then "apply" a frame to it. Rather, individuals constantly project into the world around them the interpretive frames that allow them to make sense of it; we only shift frames (or realize that we have habitually applied a frame) when incongruity calls for a frame-shift. In other words, we only become aware of the frames that we always already use when something forces us to replace one frame with another.

Framing, a term used in media studies, sociology and psychology, refers to the social construction of a social phenomenon by mass media sources or specific political or social movements or organizations. It is an inevitable process of selective influence over the individual's perception of the meanings attributed to words or phrases. A frame defines the packaging of an element of rhetoric in such a way as to encourage certain interpretations and to discourage others.

Framing is so effective because it is a heuristic, or mental shortcut that may not always yield desired results; and is seen as a 'rule of thumb'. According to Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, human beings are by nature "cognitive misers", meaning they prefer to do as little thinking as possible. Frames provide people a quick and easy way to process information. Hence, people will use the previously mentioned mental filters (a series of which is called a schema) to make sense of incoming messages. This gives the sender and framer of the information enormous power to use these schemas to influence how the receivers will interpret the message.

Framing effect in psychology and economics

Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman have shown that framing can affect the outcome (ie. the choices one makes) of choice problems, to the extent that several of the classic axioms of rational

choice do not hold. This led to the development of prospect theory as an alternative to rational choice theory.

The context or framing of problems adopted by decision-makers results in part from extrinsic manipulation of the decision-options offered, as well as from forces intrinsic to decision-makers, e.g., their norms, habits, and unique temperament.

Experimental demonstration

Tversky and Kahneman (1981) demonstrated systematic reversals of preference when the same problem is presented in different ways, for example in the Asian disease problem. Participants were asked to "imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume the exact scientific estimate of the consequences of the programs are as follows."

The first group of participants were presented with a choice between programs: In a group of 600 people,

Program A: "200 people will be saved"

Program B: "there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved, and a two-thirds probability that no people will be saved"

72 percent of participants preferred program A (the remainder, 28 percent, opting for program B).

The second group of participants were presented with the choice between: In a group of 600 people,

Program C: "400 people will die"

Program D: "there is a one-third probability that nobody will die, and a two-third probability that 600 people will die"

In this decision frame, 78 percent preferred program D, with the remaining 22 percent opting for program C.

Programs A and C are identical, as are programs B and D. The change in the decision frame between the two groups of participants produced a preference reversal: when the programs were presented in terms of lives saved, the participants preferred the secure program, A (= C). When the programs were presented in terms of expected deaths, participants chose the gamble D (= B).

Absolute and relative influences

Framing effects arise because one can frequently frame a decision using multiple scenarios, wherein one may express benefits either as a relative risk reduction (RRR), or as absolute risk reduction (ARR). Extrinsic control over the cognitive distinctions (between risk tolerance and reward anticipation) adopted by decision makers can occur through altering the presentation of relative risks and absolute benefits.

People generally prefer the absolute certainty inherent in a positive framing-effect, which offers an assurance of gains. When decision-options appear framed as a likely gain, risk-averse choices predominate.

A shift toward risk-seeking behavior occurs when a decision-maker frames decisions in negative terms, or adopts a negative framing effect.

Frame-manipulation research

Researchers have found that framing decision-problems in a positive light generally results in less-risky choices; with negative framing of problems, riskier choices tend to result. According to behavioral economists:

positive framing effects (associated with risk aversion) result from presentation of options as sure (or absolute) gains

negative framing effects (associated with a preference shift toward choosing riskier options) result from options presented as the relative likelihood of losses

Researchers have found that framing-manipulation invariably affects subjects, but to varying degrees. Individuals proved risk averse when presented with value-increasing options; but when faced with value decreasing contingencies, they tended towards increased risk-taking. Researchers found that variations in decision-framing achieved by manipulating the options to represent either a gain or as a loss altered the risk-aversion preferences of decision-makers.

In one study, 57% of the subjects chose a medication when presented with benefits in relative terms, whereas only 14.7% chose a medication whose benefit appeared in absolute terms. Further questioning of the patients suggested that, because the subjects ignored the underlying risk of disease, they perceived benefits as greater when expressed in relative terms.-

Theoretical models

Researchers have proposed various models explaining the framing effect:

cognitive theories, such as the Fuzzy-trace theory, attempt to explain framing-effects by determining the amount of cognitive processing effort devoted to determining the value of potential

gains and losses.

prospect theory explains the framing-effect in functional terms, determined by preferences for differing perceived values, based on the assumption that people give a greater weighting to losses than to equivalent gains.

motivational theories explain framing-effects in terms of hedonic forces affecting individuals, such as fears and wishes--based on the notion that negative emotions evoked by potential losses usually out-weigh the emotions evoked by hypothetical gains.

cognitive cost-benefit trade-off theory defines choice as a compromise between desires, either as a preference for a correct decision or a preference for minimized cognitive effort. This model, which dovetails elements of cognitive and motivational theories, postulates that calculating the value of a sure gain takes much less cognitive effort than that required to select a risky gain.

Neuroimaging

Cognitive neuroscientists have linked the framing-effect to neural activity in the amygdala, and have identified another brain-region, the orbital and medial prefrontal cortex (OMPFC), that appears to moderate the role of emotion on decisions. Using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to monitor brain-activity during a financial decision-making task, they observed greater activity in the OMPFC of those research subjects less susceptible to framing-effects.

Framing theory and frame analysis in sociology

Framing theory and frame analysis provide a broad theoretical approach that analysts have used in communication studies, news (Johnson-Cartee, 1995), politics, and social movements (among other applications).

According to some sociologists, the "social construction of collective action frames" involves "public discourse, that is, the interface of media discourse and interpersonal interaction; persuasive communication during mobilization campaigns by movement organizations, their opponents and countermovement organizations; and consciousness raising during episodes of collective action."

History

Word-selection or diction has been a component of rhetoric since time immemorial. But most commentators attribute the concept of framing to the work of Erving Goffman and point especially to his 1974 book, *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Goffman used the idea of frames to label "schemata of interpretation" that allow individuals or groups "to locate, perceive, identify, and label" events and occurrences, thus rendering meaning, organizing experiences, and guiding actions. Goffman's framing concept evolved out of his 1959 work, *The*

Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, a commentary on the management of impressions. These works arguably depend on Kenneth Boulding's concept of image.

Social movements

Sociologists have utilized framing to explain the process of social movements. Movements act as carriers of beliefs and ideologies (compare memes). In addition, they operate as part of the process of constructing meaning for participants and opposers (Snow & Benford, 1988). Sociologists deem mass-movements "successful" when the frames projected align with the frames of participants to produce resonance between the two parties. Researchers of framing speak of this process as frame re-alignment.

Frame-alignment

Snow and Benford (1988) regard frame-alignment as an important element in social mobilization or movement. They argue that when individual frames become linked in congruency and complementariness, "frame alignment" occurs, producing "frame resonance", a catalyst in the process of a group making the transition from one frame to another (although not all framing efforts prove successful). The conditions that affect or constrain framing efforts include:

"The robustness, completeness, and thoroughness of the framing effort". Snow and Benford (1988) identify three core framing-tasks, and state that the degree to which framers attend to these tasks will determine participant mobilization. They characterize the three tasks as:

diagnostic framing for the identification of a problem and assignment of blame
prognostic framing to suggest solutions, strategies, and tactics to a problem
motivational framing that serves as a call to arms or rationale for action

The relationship between the proposed frame and the larger belief-system; centrality - the frame cannot be of low hierarchical significance and salience within the larger belief system. Its range and interrelatedness - if the framer links the frame to only one core belief or value that, in itself, has a limited range within the larger belief system, the frame has a high degree of being discounted.

Relevance of the frame to the realities of the participants; a frame must seem relevant to participants and must also inform them. Empirical credibility or testability can constrain relevancy: it relates to participant experience, and has narrative fidelity, meaning that it fits in with existing cultural myths and narrations.

Cycles of protest (Tarrow 1983a; 1983b); the point at which the frame emerges on the timeline of the current era and existing preoccupations with social change. Previous frames may affect efforts to impose a new frame.

Snow and Benford (1988) propose that once someone has constructed proper frames as described above, large-scale changes in society such as those necessary for social movement can be achieved through frame-alignment.

Types

Frame-alignment comes in four forms,: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension and frame transformation.

Frame bridging involves the "linkage of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 467). It involves the linkage of a movement to "unmobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters" (p. 467) of people who share similar views or grievances but who lack an organizational base.

Frame amplification refers to "the clarification and invigoration of an interpretive frame that bears on a particular issue, problem, or set of events" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 469). This interpretive frame usually involves the invigorating of values or beliefs.

Frame extensions represent a movement's effort to incorporate participants by extending the boundaries of the proposed frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of targeted groups.

Frame transformation becomes necessary when the proposed frames "may not resonate with, and on occasion may even appear antithetical to, conventional lifestyles or rituals and extant interpretive frames" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 473).

When this happens, the securing of participants and support requires new values, new meanings and understandings. Goffman (1974, p. 43-44) calls this "keying", where "activities, events, and biographies that are already meaningful from the standpoint of some primary framework, in terms of another framework" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 474) such that they are seen differently. Two types of frame transformation exist:

Domain-specific transformations, such as the attempt to alter the status of groups of people, and Global interpretive frame-transformation, where the scope of change seems quite radical--as in a change of world-views, total conversions of thought, or uprooting of everything familiar (for example: moving from communism to market capitalism; religious conversion, etc.).

Frame analysis as rhetorical criticism

Although the idea of language-framing had been explored earlier by Kenneth Burke (i.e., terministic screens), political communication researcher Jim A. Kuypers first published work advancing "framing analysis" as a rhetorical perspective in 1997. His approach begins inductively by looking for themes that persist across time in a text (for Kuypers, primarily news narratives on an issue or

event), and then determining how those themes are framed. Kuypers' work begins with the assumption that frames are powerful rhetorical entities that "induce us to filter our perceptions of the world in particular ways, essentially making some aspects of our multi-dimensional reality more noticeable than other aspects. They operate by making some information more salient than other information. . . ."

In his 2009 work, *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action* Kuypers offers a detailed template for doing framing analysis from a rhetorical perspective. According to Kuypers, "Framing is a process whereby communicators, consciously or unconsciously, act to construct a point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be interpreted by others in a particular manner. Frames operate in four key ways: they define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Frames are often found within a narrative account of an issue or event, and are generally the central organizing idea." Kuypers' work is based on the premise that framing is a rhetorical process and as such it is best examined from a rhetorical point of view.

Episodic Framing vs. Thematic Framing

In his 1991 research, Shanto Iyengar proposed there are two types of framing, episodic and thematic.

In episodic framing, the coverage focuses on a single event or instance and does not provide much background information on the subject. This leads the receiver of the frame to assume the individual is responsible. For example, on a story about healthcare, episodic framing would cause a viewer to believe that a person who gets sick but does not have health insurance was being irresponsible, when in fact there may have been other factors at play that the individual cannot control.

In thematic framing, the coverage puts the issue in a general or abstract context while providing a lot of background information. This leads the frame receivers assuming society is at fault for all problems. Using the same healthcare example, thematic framing would cause television viewers to think that society is at fault for everyone who does not possess health insurance, when in fact in some cases people are irresponsible.

Politics

Framing a political issue, a political party or a political opponent is a strategic goal in politics, particularly in the United States of America. Both the Democratic and Republican political parties compete to successfully harness its power of persuasion. According to the New York Times:

Even before the election, a new political word had begun to take hold of the party, beginning on the

West Coast and spreading like a virus all the way to the inner offices of the Capitol. That word was 'framing.' Exactly what it means to 'frame' issues seems to depend on which Democrat you are talking to, but everyone agrees that it has to do with choosing the language to define a debate and, more important, with fitting individual issues into the contexts of broader story lines.

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Because framing has the ability to alter the public's perception, politicians engage in battles to determine how issues are framed. Hence, the way the issues are framed in the media reflects who is winning the battle. For instance, according to Robert Entman, professor of Communication at George Washington University, in the build up to the Gulf War the conservatives were successful in making the debate whether to attack sooner or later, with no mention of the possibility of not attacking. Since the media picked up on this and also framed the debate in this fashion, the conservatives won

George Lakoff, a Berkeley professor of cognitive linguistics, has been a prominent voice in discussing the effects of framing on politics.

One particular example of Lakoff's work that attained some degree of fame, was his advice to rename trial lawyers (unpopular in the United States) as "public protection attorneys". Though Americans have not generally adopted this suggestion, the Association of Trial Lawyers of America did rename themselves the "American Association of Justice", in what the Chamber of Commerce called an effort to hide their identity.

The New York Times depicted similar intensity among Republicans:

In one recent memo, titled 'The 14 Words Never to Use,' Luntz urged conservatives to restrict themselves to phrases from what he calls ... the 'New American Lexicon.' Thus, a smart Republican, in Luntz's view, never advocates 'drilling for oil'; he prefers 'exploring for energy.' He should never criticize the 'government,' which cleans our streets and pays our firemen; he should attack 'Washington,' with its ceaseless thirst for taxes and regulations. 'We should never use the word outsourcing,' Luntz wrote, 'because we will then be asked to defend or end the practice of allowing companies to ship American jobs overseas.'

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From a political perspective, framing has widespread consequences. For example, the concept of framing links with that of agenda-setting: by consistently invoking a particular frame, the framing party may effectively control discussion and perception of the issue. Sheldon Rampton and John Stauber in *Trust Us, We're Experts* illustrate how public-relations (PR) firms often use language to help frame a given issue, structuring the questions that then subsequently emerge. For example, one firm advises clients to use "bridging language" that uses a strategy of answering questions with specific terms or ideas in order to shift the discourse from an uncomfortable topic to a more comfortable one. Practitioners of this strategy might attempt to draw attention away from one frame

in order to focus on another. As Lakoff notes, "On the day that George W. Bush took office, the words "tax relief" started coming out of the White House." By refocusing the structure away from one frame ("tax burden" or "tax responsibilities"), individuals can set the agenda of the questions asked in the future.

Cognitive linguists point to an example of framing in the phrase "tax relief". In this frame, use of the concept "relief" entails a concept of (without mentioning the benefits resulting from) taxes putting strain on the citizen:

The current tax code is full of inequities. Many single moms face higher marginal tax rates than the wealthy. Couples frequently face a higher tax burden after they marry. The majority of Americans cannot deduct their charitable donations. Family farms and businesses are sold to pay the death tax. And the owners of the most successful small businesses share nearly half of their income with the government. President Bush's tax cut will greatly reduce these inequities. It is a fair plan that is designed to provide tax relief to everyone who pays income taxes.

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Alternative frames may emphasize the concept of taxes as a source of infrastructural support to businesses:

The truth is that the wealthy have received more from America than most Americans--not just wealth but the infrastructure that has allowed them to amass their wealth: banks, the Federal Reserve, the stock market, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the legal system, federally-sponsored research, patents, tax supports, the military protection of foreign investments, and much much more. American taxpayers support the infrastructure of wealth accumulation. It is only fair that those who benefit most should pay their fair share.

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Frames can limit debate by setting the vocabulary and metaphors through which participants can comprehend and discuss an issue. They form a part not just of political discourse, but of cognition. In addition to generating new frames, politically-oriented framing research aims to increase public awareness of the connection between framing and reasoning.

Examples

The initial response of the Bush administration to the assault of September 11, 2001 was to frame the acts of terror as crime. This framing was replaced within hours by a war metaphor, yielding the War on Terror." The difference between these two framings is in the implied response. Crime connotes bringing criminals to justice, putting them on trial and sentencing them, whereas as war implies enemy territory, military action and war powers for government.

Recent popularization of the term "escalation" to describe an increase in American troop-levels in Iraq. This implies that the United States has deliberately increased the scope of conflict in a

provocative manner. It also implies that U.S. strategy entails a long-term military presence in Iraq, whereas "surge" framing implies a powerful but brief, transitory increase in intensity.

The "bad apple" frame, as in the proverb "one bad apple spoils the barrel". This frame implies that removing one underachieving or corrupt official from an institution will solve a given problem; an opposing frame presents the same problem as systematic or structural to the institution itself--a source of infectious and spreading rot.

The "taxpayers money" frame, rather than public or government funds which implies that individual taxpayers have a claim or right to set government policy based upon their payment of tax rather than their status as citizens or voters and that taxpayers have a right to control public funds that are the shared property of all citizens and also privileges individual self interest above group interest.

The "collective property" frame, which implies that property owned by individuals is really owned by a collective in which those individuals are members. This collective can be a territorial one, such as a nation, or an abstract one that does not map to a specific territory.

Program-names that may only describe the intended effects of a program but can also imply their effectiveness. These include:

"Foreign Aid" (which implies that spending money will aid foreigners, rather than harm them)

"Social security" (which implies that the program can be relied on to provide security for a society)

"Stabilisation policy" (which implies that a policy will have a stabilizing effect).

Based on opinion polling and focus groups, ecoAmerica, a nonprofit environmental marketing and messaging firm, has advanced the position that global warming is an ineffective framing due to its identification as a leftist advocacy issue. The organization has suggested to government officials and environmental groups that alternate formulations of the issues would be more effective.

In her 2009 book *Frames of War* Judith Butler argues that the justification within liberal-democracies for war, and atrocities committed in the course of war, (referring specifically to the current war in Iraq and to Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay) entails a framing of the (especially Muslim) 'other' as pre-modern/primitive and ultimately not human in the same way as citizens within the liberal order.

Applications

Finance

Preference reversals and other associated phenomena are of wider relevance within behavioural economics, as they contradict the predictions of rational choice, the basis of traditional economics. Framing biases affecting investing, lending, borrowing decisions make one of the themes of behavioral finance.

Law

Edward Zelinsky has shown that framing effects can explain some observed behaviors of legislators.

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