

The Framing or the Interpretation Frames Theory

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Keywords: *cultural studies, culture, media effects, alternative paradigm*

Abstract. *The article presents one of the latest theories in the field of media effect research. The origins of the theory are in Sociology (Goffman) and in Psychology (Kahneman and Tversky) and have a broad application also in Economics. The development of the Framing Theory in Communication Science was related to the Agenda Setting Research and the research of the so called Priming Effect. The research methodology that has been used in the last twenty years to analyze the news under the Framing perspective is also presented. The analysis of public relations campaigns, especially the part of media relations, is successful using the Framing Model.*

Research on the effects of media communication is the largest chapter of the communication studies. If we were to analyze the work of American authors who carried out the most relevant studies of the area, such as Paul Lazarsfeld, Carl Hovland, Harold Lasswell, Elihu Katz, we realise that the center of their research is embedded in the effects of media. Even Marshall McLuhan, the founder of the Toronto school, father of technological determinism in media research, spoke about mediatic communication. There is a set of factors that determine the propensity of research.

Media organizations are interested in the effects produced by communication in order to optimize communication processes. Professional communicators, journalists, ask themselves questions in this context on the responsibility of their work; the

advertising industry is probably the most interested in finding the answer to the questions regarding the effects of communication. The interest of the state to determine the effects of media communication is linked to the capacity of its institutions to develop public policies (for example, laws on protection of minors, space and time for advertisers, etc). Due to excessive publicity of political life and also customization, parties and politicians can be very interested in media communication especially during election campaigns. The civil society, the critics of political power are interested in the effect of media on the personality of individuals, of leveling and narrowing the cognitive horizon of the contemporary public. Recent questions are asked regarding the effects of media communication on groups, the effect of exposure to violent media, the effect of advertising communication, the intensity of media communication and its effect through the internet. (Bonfadelli: 2004, 16).

Media Communication effect is considered to be any transformation, even if partial or obtained by interacting with other factors, which are due to media communication (Jarren/Bonfadelli: 2001, p.343). Berelson defines the effects of communication in the following manner: any change in public behaviour that is caused by exposure to media messages. Denis McQuail structures the types of media effects on two axes, in terms of planning and action. Since the publication of the first study, which used the name *agenda setting* for a new theory on the cognitive level of media, more than thirty years have passed. Production in the scientific field is significant. The basic model has undergone significant changes over the decades starting from the premise that media gives us subjects to think about but does not tell us how we should think about a subject. Some authors make a difference in what concerns what they call *Second-Level Agenda-Setting*, the transition from the influence of media on the issues of public concern, to the influence of how some themes are perceived (Bonfadelli, 2004, 239). On many occasions the *framing theory* and the *Second-Level Agenda-Setting theory* are considered equal. Another concept that is used under the umbrella of general theories on the cognitive effects of the media is the *priming concept*.

By *priming* we understand that certain subjects are privileged by the media, Iyengar and Kinder proving that fact on the basis of the judgment coming from experimental psychology that no individual judges a certain person or a particular fact on the basis of all information existing, but only on the basis of information that is available. These value judgments can be influenced by media (Jäckel: 2008, 1985).

When one uses framing explanations one enters the field of interdisciplinary social sciences, which includes aspects of sociology, political science, psychology, and not least communication studies. Frames' theory is based on the assumption that the way in which news is presented by media influences the way the public receives the news. The roots of this theory lie in psychology and sociology. Psychologists Kahneman and Tversky are the first authors who use the frame models. For the relevance of his studies, Kahneman was rewarded with the Nobel Prize for economics in 2002. The central idea is that different presentations of similar situations can

decisively influence the choice of how individuals assess a situation and relate to the decision-making processes. Sociological theory foundations of the frame design is the work of Canadian Erving Goffman, who became chairman of the *American Sociological Association*, and his collaborators, who believe that individuals cannot understand the world in its entirety and therefore constantly seek to interpret their life experiences so that what is happening around them could make sense. In order to structure information effectively, individuals use the interpretative schemes, frames or in other words interpretation frameworks, the first meaning of the term *frame* being exactly *framework* (Scheufele DA / D Tewksbury, 2007, 11-12).

Therefore, *frames* are nothing else but the framework of interpretation that works in the form of cognitive structures in the journalists' mind concerning media; these structures have the role of contributing to the processes of selection and presentation of information. Frames are selective views on certain issues or events.

The most cited definitions of framing, in its process of creating these interpretive frameworks in literature in particular the Anglo-Saxon authors are: Entman (1993), Gamson and Modigliani (1989), Gitlin (1980), Iyengar (1991), and Scheufele D. (1999).

Iyengar and Simon, for example, refer to one of the parents of communication studies, Walter Lippmann to define framing: *as Walter Lippmann noted nearly seventy years ago, we tend to know little about what is happening, why it happened and what ought to happen. But in modern times we do have pictures in our heads courtesy of ABC, CBS, CNN and NBC* (Iyengar/Simon: 1997, 256).

For Entman, framing is about the selection and placement (salience) of information, a process that is performed on more dimensions. Some themes are preferred by the media, others are downright ignored. Cognitive and emotional elements can give a specific weight to a theme. Thus: *to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text (...). Frame (...). defines problems – determines what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnoses causes – identifies the forces creating the problem; makes moral judgments – evaluates causal agents and their effects; and suggests remedies – offers and justifies treatments for problems and predict their likely effects* (Entman, 1993, 52).

Gitlin speaks about the role of framing for journalists. Frames are for him metaphors of cognitive structure, which allow journalists to work faster and to rely on routine. Gamson Modigliani highlights the dynamic instability of the frames of the media which are dependant on social discourse.

In Entman's opinion each frame includes elements of classical arguments: defining the problem, causal analysis, moral court and proposed remedy, in other words the solution (Entman, 1993).

The role of frame-ups according to the German researcher Dietr Scheufele, who emigrated overseas where he embraced in fact this theory, is to give the story a spin

(Scheufele D. 1999, 115). We cannot talk about frames without having in mind the dichotomy, for each frame structure we have a complementary structure, i.e. the opposite.

In empirical terms, research with a media topic which is based on the framing theory uses input-output analysis, content analysis (for instance in the case study), perhaps the experiment and source analysis and not least semi-structured interviews with journalists. Framing research is extremely important for public relations because it allows to determine how the media relations input is transformed in mediatic output. The advantage of using framing theory is that it allows the identification and analysis of changes in the mediatic presentation of some events.

Considered by some researchers as an essential contribution to the development of media effects research, by others just a paradigmatic approach of no empirical relevance, framing theory sparks a real interest among researchers in the United States, Great Britain, Switzerland and Germany. In 2007 the famous publication *Journal of Communication* (one of the few ISI papers in the field of communication studies), devoted an entire issue to the relationship between framing, priming and agenda setting under the coordination of professor Dietr Scheufele. Between 1990-2005 a number of 135 articles on framing were published in the most important international journals in the field of communication studies: *Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Communication*, and *European Journal of Communication*.

There are also attempts to classify frames. Swiss researcher Jörg Matthes talks about two categories of *mediatic-frames: formal-stylistic frames* and *contained frames* which structure specific issues.

Iyengar and Simon talk about episodic frames and theme frames. In the first case some singular events are presented in a special form, while in the case of themed frames a series of events are presented in the form of interpretative frameworks that take into account a wider background.

The multidimensionality of framing phenomenon should not be overlooked. There are: framing by selecting thematic issues, framing by internal structure, by creating relationships between different aspects of the theme and last but not least, framing through foreign contextualization by creating relationships with other topics, what we call in the field *frame-bridging* (Jäckel: 2008, 1985).

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