

Framing literature from media research

Eriksson, Johan, Introduction to this volume

There are new themes of fear today in fiction and politics which concern a wider agenda of threats. This broad variety of fears has become increasingly politicised. The scope of inquiry of this book is pragmatic, emphasising how such concepts as threat are used and understood in practice.

In this book, we are particularly concerned with how threat images become the concern of politics and societal debate.

The overarching aim is to understand how things we can be afraid of take on *societal salience*. This notion is meant to capture things that, in a given time and place, are widely seen as the most important and topical issues—what is currently common currency. He gives the example of the anti-nazi manifesto published in November 1999 in the 4 major newspapers. The societal salience of things depends on whether media, government, social movements, academia and other opinion makers pay serious attention to them.

The politics of threat images is a major theme in this book. There are 2 aspects:

- 1.) the struggle about what should and should not take on societal salience
- 2.) the struggle about how the ensuring result should be understood, what counts as shared meaning. This is often called the **framing** aspect.

By keeping these two aspects analytically distinct, it is possible to study how and why different ways of framing impact on the societal salience of the subject matter.

We need to ask: who is doing the framing
for what reasons
how they are doing it
under what circumstances their framing has political impact

Framing is the power struggle for a shared narrative.

The political process of framing is about how policy makers, as well as nonofficial agents such as the media, portray or construct things they are afraid of.

This process is about establishing or maintaining the power of symbols and metaphors.

Relevant questions are thus: what threat images do media and other agents address?
how are these things framed?
who gains and loses by portraying something as a threat or not?

The second major theme of the book is continuity and change. What patterns of continuity and change can be discerned with regard to threat images and the phenomena they refer to?

The task is to analyse how continuity and change are shaped and contextualised.

The verb framing refers to the process whereby an agent develops a particular interpretive schemata.

Framing is one of those heuristics people employ to make sense of the complex world they live in.

Schön and Rein see framing as “symbolic contests over the social meaning of an issue domain, where meaning implies not only what is at issue, but what is to be done”.

Any given event or condition can be framed in more than one way.

Little is known of whether and how the distinctive features of the phenomena have an impact on framing.

In this book, a distinction is suggested between three types of referent issues that may or may not be framed as threats: events, structural conditions, and actors.

The societal significance of an event framed as a threat is usually only temporary, particularly in the media. When the event is over, the news value is lost and the significance of the issue rapidly fades.

We can talk of 'master frames' such as the Cold War, which was a frame with remarkable staying power.

This book concerns the politics of threat frames, the symbolic contest over meaning in society. The politics we are interested in concerns the struggle to maintain and challenge widely shared frames, established definitions, traditional views, and connotations.

The ways in which people frame issues affects how they view the consequences of choice.

Lars Gustafsson argues that a basic concern for the media and in all politics is the 'privilege of formulating problems'

Entman, Robert M. (1993) "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm", *Journal of Communication* 43 (4), pp. 51-58.

According to Entman, there is no general statement of framing theory (despite its omnipresence across the social sciences and humanities) that shows exactly "how frames become embedded within and make themselves manifest in a text, or how framing influences thinking". (51)

"The concept of framing consistently offers a way to described the power of a communicating text." (51)

Framing essentially involves **selection** and **salience**.

"To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described." (52)

Frames define problems (determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values); diagnose causes (identify the forces creating the problem); make moral judgments (evaluate causal agents and their effects); and suggest remedies (offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects) (p.52)

Frames have at least 4 locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| communicators | make framing judgements in deciding what to say, guided by frames (schemata) that organize their belief systems |
| the text | contains frames "which are manifested by the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements" (52) |
| the culture | is the stock of commonly invoked frames: "culture might be defined as the empirically demonstrable set of |

common frames exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping..." (53)

How Frames Work

Saliency means making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences (53).

Schemata and closely related concepts such as categories, scripts, or stereotypes connote mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals' processing of information (53).

"the frame determines whether most people notice and how they understand and remember a problem, as well as how they evaluate and choose to act upon it" (54)

-experiments suggest that frames also direct attention away from other aspects of the reality described. "Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include" (54)

Frames in Political News

Framing has important implications for political communication. Frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions. Politicians seeking support are thus compelled to compete with each other and journalists over news frames (55). "Framing in this light plays a major role in the exertion of political power—it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text." (55)

Entman refers to the Gulf War coverage in the US media in this connection:

Reflecting the play of power and boundaries of discourse over an issue, many news texts exhibit homogenous framing at one level of analysis, yet competing frames at another. Thus, in the pre-war debate over U.S. policy toward Iraq, there was a tacit consensus among U. S elites not to argue for such options as negotiation between Iraq and Kuwait. The news frame included only two remedies, war now, or sanctions now with war later. Problem definitions, causal analyses, and moral evaluations were homogenous. But between the selected remedies, framing was contested by elites, and news coverage offered different sets of facts and evaluations. "The Iraq example reveals that the power of news frames can be self-reinforcing. During the pre-war debate, any critique transcending the remedies inside the frame (war soon versus more time for sanctions) breached the bounds of acceptable discourse, hence was unlikely to influence policy." (55)

Benefits of a Consistent Concept of Framing

The concept of framing directs our attention to the details of just how a communicated text exerts its power.

Entman argues that the example of mass communication suggests how a common understanding might help constitute framing as a research paradigm (i.e. a general theory that informs most scholarship on the operation and outcomes of any particular system of thought and action). (56)

Entman lists a number of theoretical debates in the study of mass communication that would benefit from an explicit and common understanding of the concept of frames:

Audience	the concept of framing provides an operational
autonomy	definition for the notion of <i>dominant meaning</i> that is so central to debates about polysemy and audience independence in decoding media texts (see Fiske 1987). From a framing perspective, dominant meaning consists of the problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment

Capella, Joseph N. and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1996) "News Frames, Political Cynicism, and Media Cynicism", *Annals, AAPSS*, 546 pp. 71-84.

Between 1976 and 1996, media critics of news noted a fundamental change in the distribution of media coverage from issue-based stories to stories emphasizing which candidates are ahead and behind and the strategies and tactics of campaigning necessary to position a candidate to get ahead. Jamieson talks in this connection of 'the game or strategy structure of contemporary journalism' (74).

Jamieson has argued that the strategy frame is being generalised by journalists from campaigns to governance and discussions of public policy issues, such as the health care reform debate (74).

Capella and Jamieson argue in this article "that there are good reasons to be concerned about the effects of the way the news frames politicians, policy, campaigns, and governance". They point out that various agenda setting, framing and priming studies have shown that media coverage can shape how the public thinks about politics (75).

Capella and Jamieson began conducting research in 1992 aimed at understanding framing effects in different political news contexts. The evidence suggests that a preponderance of strategy frames engenders public mistrust about political campaigns. They cite studies which "support the notion that relatively small changes in the way news is framed can activate the public's cynicism about campaigns" (79).

"Framing the news is a subtle process that has effects on the public's cynicism about political campaigns and policy deliberations." (81)

Neuman, W. Russell, Marion R. Just and Ann N. Crigler (1992) *Common Knowledge. News and the Construction of Political Meaning*. Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press.

"In seeking to make sense of the political world, both the media and the public employ simplifying cognitive frames as hooks to capture a piece of the abundant flow of confusing and conflicting information from Lippmann's 'world outside'." (60)

Neuman et al. identified five predominant conceptual frames which were evident in both media coverage and informal public discourse about politics
-their examination of the way individuals conceptualize public issues reveals a complex process in which meaning is constructed from diverse personal and mediated experiences (60)

"Frames are conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information" (60)

-most analyses of framing issues in the news have focused on the media with a brief look at audience interpretations (see p 60 for long list of familiar titles; do these authors really use the word frame??)

-following Graber and Gamson, Neuman et al started first wutg tge audience

-classic theories of cognitive dissonance etc define the individual as having a set of clear-cut opinions on an issue or set of issues that determine which new information the individual will permit to cross his cognitive threshold. In empirical tests (esp with broadcast news), these theories did not survive

-the key concept is not opinion-protection, but a more complex phenomenon of interpretation and meaning construction:

observations on agenda-setting research” in J. A. Andersonm, edi *Communication Yearbook* 11, pp 603-619. Sage)

The interaction perspective of cognition and attitudes and the relevance of selection as a way of communicating opinion is best developed in framing and schema theory.

If one considers schemata as representations of issue content in the audiences' head, frames can be regarded as a parallel structure in media coverage (Entman).

Framing in communication research refers to the more or less intentional use of selected attributes, thereby constituting a particular content.

Frames, like schemata, contain knowledge and information but also interpretations and opinions on these aspects.

Framing and its effects can be conceptualised as second level agenda-setting. It focuses on the attitudinal effects of information selection rather than on the cognitive effects that first level agenda-setting has in mind.

“Agenda setting posits that the media tell us what to think about and framing deals with the issue of the media telling us how to think about an issue[...] Basically, the first level of agenda setting deals with the selection of issues by the news media and its impact on the public agenda. Framing deals with the selection of elements within a particular issue” (Ghanem, Salma, 1997, “Filling in the Tapestry: the Second Level of Agenda Setting” on M. McCombs and D.L. Shaw and D. Weaver, eds *Communication and Democracy. Exploring the Intellectual Frontiers in Agenda-Setting Theory*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum, pp 3-14, here p 8).

-the salience model of political science considers issue selection more important than opinions. Scholars supporting this model hold that parties do not compete by means of different positions regarding particular issues but rather ‘occupy’ certain issues, presenting them as the most relevant problems. This view is in sharp contrast to the traditional view of party competition which assumes that parties offer different policy solutions to the same issues. Applied to the media system, the salience model implies that media outlets with different political affinities present themselves with different issue repertoires rather than different opinions on particular issues. It can be assumed that different papers will position themselves in the political spectrum by different relevance assignment. Issue selection and presentation should thus indicate the political preferences of a paper (6). By putting an issue on the editorial agenda, media outlets can direct attention to certain problems that have so far not been sufficiently processed by the political system and thus are unlikely to appear in the news section (7)

Eilders, Christiane and Albrecht Lüter (2000) “Germany at war: competing framing strategies in German public discourse” in EJCR?

“The construction of meaning and the symbolic struggles over the definition of reality predominantly take place in the mass media. Media thus are highly important agents of the construction or denial of legitimacy. The interpretive effort involved in the justification or relegitimation of war can be described as framing.”

-The framing approach puts special emphasis on the problem definition, the causal attributions, the treatment recommendation and the construction of collective identities which taken together suggest a particular evaluation of the issue.

-Applying the framing concept to the mobilization of public opinion on the Kosovo war thus allows an in-depth analysis of the legitimacy discourse on Germany's first military engagement in its postwar history

-frames are 'schemata of interpretation that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Snow et al 1986: 464). The concept became especially prominent in social movement research where the promotion of pertinent frames is viewed as an important condition for successful protest mobilization. Framing thus is "intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists (Snow and Benford 1988: 198)

-mobilization frames are complex formations of single motivational, diagnostic and prognostic elements

-diagnostic framing refers to 'a diagnosis of some event or aspect of social life as problematic and in need of alteration'. In the context of Kosovo war, a diagnosis might include a critical discussion of human rights violations or specific national interests

-prognostic framing concerns 'a proposed solution to the diagnosed problem that specifies what has to be done'. A prognosis might, for example, call for more humanitarian action

-motivational framing is 'a call to arms or rationale for engaging in ameliorative or corrective action'. Whereas most protests researchers' understandings of motivational framing deal with the motivation of individuals to actively participate in protest events, Eilders and Lüter address the national self-image with their notion of motivation. As motivational framing has to provide an answer to the question 'why we should become involved', war approval is likely to be based on a convincing construction of collective identity. Hence, Eilders and Lüter conceptualise the discussion of motivational aspects as identity framing. In the Kosovo war, German participation might be framed as a nation-specific obligation resulting from historical experience, as a consequence of Nato membership, or as an important contribution to European identity formation

-in the case of the media discourse on the legitimacy of the Kosovo war, framing strategies are directed to the mobilization of consensus in public opinion. But it may be assumed that the mobilization of public opinion basically follows the same logic as protest mobilization (Gerhards 1992)

-applying the framing concept to the analysis of public discourse, the heterogeneity of perspectives and the competition of particular frames come into focus (Klandermans 1988, Kreissl and Sack 1998)

Fairclough, Norman (199x) Media Discourse. London: Arnold.

According to Fairclough, analysis of 'framing' draws attention to how surrounding features of the reporting discourse can influence the way in which represented discourse is interpreted (83)

Framing can be blatantly manipulative. A certain actor's statement can be depicted with the word 'said' or 'claimed, made out', for less credibility. While a report can be designed as 'objective' and 'balanced', audience interpretation can be subtly managed through framing.

Simon, Adam and Michael Xenos (2000) "Media Framing and Effective Public Deliberation", paper presented at the Communicating Civic Engagement conferences in Seattle, May 2000.

Views on discourse

- One category of scholarly work denies the impact of public discourse on behaviour and phenomena in the physical world, eg the highly textualist and audience-centered postmodern variants of cultural studies research. This 'new dogmatism' is reminiscent of the uses and gratifications research which similarly posited audiences as impervious to causal influence from the textual world. Implications of this view of discourse: if the phenomena of the discursive world are believed to have minimal effects on the cognition and behaviour of those inhabiting the physical world, then the central rationale for effective deliberation is lost and the edifice of communication action falls.
- A second category of scholarship posits that causal effects from the physical world on the discursive world exist in sufficient magnitude to preclude communicatively rational discourse. Scholars working from the Marxist perspective, for example, assumed that the communicative process is merely the reflection of material conflicts between economic classes and the forces of technical rationality pervasive in late capitalism. In such works, the public discussion of politics and culture in the media is viewed as overwhelmingly driven by forces of material power outside the public discursive sphere.
- Many political communication scholars emphasize other limitations on public deliberation that stem from the determinative power of elites. Bennett for example argues that public discourse in the mass media is 'indexed' to the conflict visible within the formal mechanisms of government, such as congressional debate. In this vision of public discourse, deliberation in the public sphere is dependent upon and merely reflects discussion occurring among those at the highest political levels. These scholars take a 'top down' view of the relationship between elite discourse and mass opinions.
- Other scholars (like Entman 1993) view the character of public deliberation as largely driven by forces of political power that originate outside the discursive sphere. This view holds that those without significant political power are unable to leave their 'imprint' on public discussion.

These theoretical streams suggest public discourse lacks sufficient independence from imbalances of power and communicative competence for communicatively rational discussion to flourish.

In contrast, other scholars view the relationship between the discursive and material worlds in a manner more favourable to expectations of a communicatively rational process of public discussion —eg. Habermas. From this perspective, one may envision deliberative communication as a likely outcome in situations where virtually all of the relevant interlocutors meet each other on roughly equal footing in a given discursive arena.

The scholarship relevant to questions of the existence of meaningful and efficacious deliberation in our contemporary, mass-mediated public sphere thus leads to a number of competing expectations about discourse.

Questions that flow from the discussion:

-What is the relationship between the discursive world and the material world in our society?

- Do influences from the material world on discourse effectively swamp the conditions necessary for meaningful deliberation?
- Does public discussion merely reflect struggles for material and political power in the material world or does it exhibit a more communicatively rational character?
- Does public discourse have effects on the inhabitants of the material world that are consistent with a deliberative process?

Framing

The idea of framing first appeared in Goffman's (1974) seminal work. The underlying presumption was that the organization of messages affects subsequent thoughts and actions.

Some research (esp by sociologists and communication researchers) approaches framing from a constructivist standpoint. Framing is seen as involving the organization of information. At the same time, these scholars tend to focus on the way frames thematize accounts of events and issues. See for ex Gans and Modigliani (1987) who say frames are the "central organizing idea or storyline that provides meaning" (1987, p 143). Their general idea is that a frame is an ever-present discursive device that channels the audience as it constructs the meaning of particular communicative acts.

Nelson et al (1997) see framing as the process by which a communication source defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy. This pinpoints the heart of framing: **the construction of political issues.**

A model of framing can be built on the premise that to frame a message in a given way entails that it contains certain associations rather than others.

To say a message constructs an issue, we are really saying that it has built-in particular associations between concepts. Thus, framing analysis is a careful examination of the way concepts are associated within discourse.

The research task is defined by Simon and Xenos as examining the interaction of competing frames within media discourse over time; documenting the existence of univalent (one dominant frame), bivalent (two dominant frames) or multivalent (many significant frames) patterns of discourse and thus to determine if (ruling out other causes) discursive claims rise and fall in prominence consistent with a pattern of deliberation where multiple issues are considered publicly and recede from discussion as they are resolved.

Iyengar, Shanto (1996) "Framing Responsibility for Political Issues", in *Annals, AAPSS*, 546, pp. 59-70-

Television's systematic reliance on episodic as opposed to thematic depictions of political life elicits individualistic attributions of responsibility for national problems (59).

-The concept of responsibility is an essential building block of all social knowledge. Attributions of responsibility exert powerful influence over a broad spectrum of attitudes. The two principal types of attributions correspond to causal and treatment responsibility. Causal responsibility concerns the origin of a problem. Treatment responsibility focusses on who or what has the ability to alleviate the problem.

-While the influence of culture or ideology on attribution of responsibility cannot be denied, there is considerable evidence that short-term factors are just as important.

interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed, and accepted by most people. "To identify a meaning as dominant or preferred is to suggest a particular framing of the situation that is most heavily supported by the text and is congruent with the most common audience schemata." (56)

Put differently: a framing paradigm cautions researchers not to take fugitive components of the message and show how they *might* be interpreted in ways that opposed the dominant meaning.

People can of course recall their own facts, forge linkages not made explicitly in the text, or retrieve from memory a causal explanation or cure that is absent from the text. But J. R. Zaller (*The nature and origins of mass opinion*, 1992, New York: Cambridge University Press), D. Kahneman and A. Tversky ("Choice, values, and frames", *American Psychologist*, 1984, 39, pp 341-350) and S. Iyengar (*Is Anyone Responsible?*, 1991, Chicago: University of Chicago Press), among others, suggest that on most matters of social or political interest, people are not generally so well-informed and cognitively active, and that framing therefore heavily influences their responses to communications (56)

journalistic
objectivity

"Journalists may follow the rules for 'objective' reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news text that prevents most audience members from making a balanced assessment of the situation." (56) It is often the spin doctors that impose their dominant frames on the news as journalists lack a common understanding of framing.

content analysis

Content analysis informed by a theory of framing would avoid treating all negative or positive terms as equally salient or influential. Otherwise, the tendency of coders is to neglect to measure the salience of elements in the text, and fail to gauge the relationships of the most salient clusters of messages—the frames—to the audience's schemata. Without a framing paradigm, content analysis may yield data that misrepresent the media messages that most audience members are actually picking up. (*I would make the same case about narrative analysis, if the two are actually distinct.*)

public opinion

According to Zaller (1992), framing is a central power in the democratic process, for political elites control the framing of issues. (57)

Entman argues that the field of communication can develop a core of knowledge from its wide ambit and eclectic approaches. That core of knowledge could translate into research paradigms contributing to social theory in the largest sense (58).

Beliefs about who or what is responsible are likely to shift depending on the information environment in which political issues and events are presented. "Today, the most important of these contextual influences is television news." (61)

-The concept of framing refers to the effects of presentation on judgment and choice. (61)

-Most people encounter the world of public affairs through the language of television, and television news coverage of political issues embodies two distinct frames or modes of presentation: the episodic news frame and the thematic news frame. (61)

-The episodic news frame depicts issues in terms of specific instances, for example, a terrorist bombing. Episodic reports are essentially illustrations of issues (62)

-The thematic frame, by contrast, depicts political issues more broadly and abstractly by placing them in some appropriate context: historical, geographical or otherwise (62)

-In practice, few news reports are purely episodic or thematic. But content analyses of tv news coverage suggest that in most cases, one frame or the other predominates (62)

-The nature of television news and the increasingly competitive nature of the news business have combined to create a premium for episodic coverage of political issues. Episodic reports tend to provide good pictures; they do not require reporters with subject-matter expertise; being devoid of interpretative analysis, they are less likely to be labeled as biased (jfr BBC World)

-Empirical studies indicate that episodic framing breeds individualistic as opposed to societal attributions of responsibility (62)

-Iyengar concludes that exposure to thematic framing of issues can and does override core values and viewer's personal dispositions (69)

"Because the public's reasoning about responsibility is susceptible to framing effects and because the episodic frame is so predominant, television news, in the final analysis, is a significant resource for political elites " (70)