THE FRAMING OF PROTEST

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Abstract: Framing is the process of selecting certain aspects from the perceived reality and placing them prominently within messages, in order to promote a particular definition of the situation, a certain causal interpretation, a certain moral evaluation and a proposal for some remedies. During social movements or protests, especially in an era of post-truth, alternative facts and fake news, framing is relevant in different ways of constructing and interpreting messages. Framing is a dynamic process, consisting in collective and ongoing shaping and reshaping of frames by protesters and audiences, in order to mobilize adherents, appeal to authorities and silence opponents. Social media enables social movement activists and participants to organize offline protests and to expand repertoires of action. Online platforms (social networks, etc.) facilitate dissemination of collective action messages and recruiting of supporters. Also, social media influence frame alignment processes of social movements.

Keywords: Social movements, Social media, Digital activism, Cyber protest, Facebook

1. Introduction

Framing is a pluralistic, multiparadigmatic concept, which is quite influential and, therefore, widely used in social studies, communication studies, media and journalism studies, political communication, social movement studies and so on. There are two aspects of framing which determine this ambiguity: the cognitive and the communicative dimensions of the process.

Framing as a concept stems from the constructionist paradigm, starting from the principle that meanings are not assigned automatically to objects, events or circumstances, but are the result of socially mediated interpretive processes. Frames are interpretive schemas (patterns of interpretation) that condense and simplify the outside world by selectively emphasizing and encoding objects, experiences, events and situations (Snow & Benford, 1988: 137).

Entman has defined framing as involving mainly 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.” (Entman, 1993: 52). In the same vein, Dejica sees frame analysis as an “approach which shows how people understand activities or situations” (Dejica, 2010: 121).

Framing is a process whereby communicators act to construct a perspective that encourages the facts of a given situation to be defined by others in a shared specific manner. Frames are generally central organizing ideas often found within a narrative account of an issue or event, providing interpretive cues for otherwise neutral facts (Kuypers, 2009: 182).

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2. Framing of Social Movements

Framing is particularly useful in social movement studies, since it accounts for symbolic processes (meaning production and interpretation) of collective action mobilization. Social movements are collective processes through which social actors articulate their interests, express concerns and critiques, and propose remedies to identified problems by engaging in a variety of collective actions. These movements have three features: 1) they involve political or cultural conflicts and have specifically identified opponents; 2) they are connected through dense informal groups and networks; and 3) they are orientated towards developing and sharing distinct collective identities (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 20).

Social movements use protest as a typical form of action, even if they do not employ protests alone. (*Ibidem*: 168). Protests can be defined as “sites of contestation in which bodies, symbols, identities, practices, and discourses are used to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalized power relations” (*Ibidem*: 165).

Framing processes have been included as part of social movement studies since the mid-1980s (Benford and Snow 2000: 613). Social movements “frame or assign meaning to and interpret, relevant events and conditions in ways that are intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists" (Snow & Benford, 1988: 198).

Social movement mobilization includes two basic processes: persuasion (consensus mobilization) and activation (action mobilization). These two processes are performed by three core framing tasks (Snow & Benford, 1988: 199-202):

Diagnostic framing specifies a problematic event, issue or element of social life, including the attribution of blame and causality. The attributional component of diagnostic framing concerns the targeting of responsibility, but the agreement regarding the source of the problem does not result automatically. Controversies over whom to blame for the grievance are quite common in social movements and usually take the form of intramovement conflicts. Also, framing is crucial in identifying the blame: abstract, impersonal forces that cause the problem inhibit mobilization, whereas clearly established persons or groups which act in a perceived malicious manner generate mobilization.

Prognostic framing proposes a solution to the problem, and indicates what remedies are needed in order to change the situation through collective action. The suggested solutions can be utopian or realistic, and a certain social movement may comprise several different prognostic elements. Solutions may include ideas and meanings otherwise neglected in society. The prognostic framing solutions are influenced and restricted by the diagnostic framing outcomes: the identification of certain problems and causes induces a limitation of possible strategies and tactics. There is another constraint on prognostic framing: the counterframing promoted by opponents, media, bystanders and so on, as the prognostic framing promoted by a movement refutes and/or rejects the solutions advocated by its rivals.

Motivational framing is the “rationale for action” (Snow & Benford, 1988: 202), because “agreement about the causes and solutions to a particular problem does not automatically produce corrective action” (*Ibid*em: 202). It is the call to arms, moving people "from the balcony to the barricades” (Snow & Benford, 2000: 615). It is influenced by the consensus mobilization framing processes, which limit its scope and strategies and tactics (repertoires of action) to be implemented.

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Diagnostic and prognostic framing focus on consensus mobilization by offering certain interpretations of existing or potential issues or manifestations, whereas motivational framing inspires action mobilization. Rhetorically, the three processes correspond to the stases (points of disagreement).

Social movements always offer one or more collective action frames, which are "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization" (Snow & Benford, 2000: 614). Collective action frames advance interpretations that suggest the necessity and expediency of performing action. Movements may have internal conflicts over which particular frame will become prevalent or may proffer several frames for different publics, but they will all have in common the implication that those who share the frame can and should take action. (Gamson, 1995: 89-90)

Three components of the collective action frames have been identified: injustice, agency, and identity (Gamson, 1995: 90).

The *injustice frames* allow movement actors to construct their grievances through a sense of moral indignation. Injustice frames not only provide evaluations about what is legitimate, but they also provide activists and potential activists with a political consciousness to challenge whatever perceived harm or affliction they have experienced.

The *agency component* of collective action frames inspires people to believe their actions can lead to change. Agency frames enable people to act by defining them as potent agents capable to influence their own history. They suggest not merely that something can be done but also that the collective action participants can do something specific to address the problem.

The *identity component* of collective action frames supports movement activists, participants and bystanders who are affected by a problem to raise an oppositional consciousness in which there is a clearly defined antagonist, whose values or interests are different.

The three core framing tasks discussed above can be articulated with the components of collective action frames. Diagnostic framing uses extensively injustice frames, prognostic framing is the main factor of the identity of the social movement and motivational framing employs the agency component. They are, in fact, different aspects of the same phenomenon of mobilization: core framing tasks adopt the macro movement perspective, whereas the components of the collective action focus on the individual (potential) participants (Johnston & Noakes, 2005: 6).

Collective action frames may vary in the degree to which they are relatively selective, strict, inelastic, and restricted or comparatively inclusive, open, flexible, and elaborated in terms of the number of themes or ideas they absorb, comprehend and articulate (Snow & Benford, 2000: 618). The scope of the collective action frames associated with most movements is limited to the interests of a particular group or to a set of related problems. Some collective action frames, however, are wider in scope and influence, functioning as a kind of master formula that influences and restricts the positions and activities of more other movements. These generic frames are referred to as “master frames,” in contrast to more common movement-specific collective action frames that may be derivative from master frames (Snow & Benford 1992: 138).

Only several collective action frames have been identified as being sufficiently comprehensive in interpretive scope, inclusivity, flexibility, and cultural resonance to function as master frames. Whereas most collective action frames are context

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specific, a master frame's articulations and attributions are sufficiently flexible, and inclusive enough so that any number of other social movements can successfully adopt and deploy it in their campaigns. Usually, once a social movement selects and advocates a markedly resonant frame that is broad in interpretive scope, other social movements within a cycle of protest will adopt that frame and adapt it to their own actions.

Master frames are linked to cycles of protest, periods of intense social movement activity in which various movements overlap in mobilization and are often connected to one another. An innovative master frame can spark derivative collective action frames and tactical innovations at the initiation of a cycle. As the cycle continues, however, the framing and tactical choices become limited by the parameters of the master frame (Johnston & Noakes, 2005: 10). Cycles of protest include the following features: a phase of acute conflict in a social system involving sudden diffusion of collective action, innovation in the forms of contention employed, new or transformed collective action frames, the coexistence of organized and spontaneous participation, and information flow between protesters and authorities.

Collective action frames can also vary is in terms of the level of resonance. The concept of resonance applies to the issue of the impact or mobilizing force of proffered framings. Two sets of interacting factors account for variation in degree of frame resonance: credibility of the proffered frame and its relative salience.

The credibility of any framing is a function of three factors: frame consistency, empirical credibility, and credibility of the frame articulators. A frame's consistency refers to the congruency between a social movement organization (SMO) articulated beliefs, claims, and actions. Thus, inconsistency can manifest itself in two ways: in terms of apparent contradictions among beliefs or claims; and in terms of perceived contradictions among framings and tactical actions (Snow & Benford, 2000: 619-621).

A second factor affecting frame resonance has to do with the empirical credibility of the collective action frame. This refers to the apparent fit between the framings and social events. The issue here is not whether diagnostic and prognostic claims are actually factual or valid, but whether their empirical referents lend themselves to being read as "real" indicators of the diagnostic claims (Snow & Benford 1988). The important point is not that the claimed connection has to be generally believable, but that it must be believable to some segment of prospective or actual adherents.

The final factor affecting the credibility of a collective action frame refers to the perceived credibility of frame articulators (status, expertise and knowledge about the specific issue are usually associated with persuasive trustworthiness).

In addition to issues of credibility, the resonance of a collective action frame is affected by its salience to targets of mobilization. Three dimensions of salience have been identified: centrality, experiential commensurability, and narrative fidelity (Snow & Benford 1992: 141).

Centrality has to do with how essential the beliefs, values, and ideas associated with movement frames are to the lives of the targets of mobilization.

Experiential commensurability constitutes a second factor contributing to a collective action frame's salience. Movement framings must be congruent or resonant with the personal, everyday experiences of the targets of mobilization. If the framings are too abstract and distant from the lives and experiences of the targeted participants, the probability of mobilization reduces.

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The last factor that appears to have significant impact on frame resonance is narrative fidelity. When proffered framings are culturally resonant, framings can be said to have what has been termed narrative fidelity (Snow & Benford, 2000: 622).

Frames are produced, developed, and negotiated not only by accomplishing to the three core framing tasks, but also by way of three sets of overlapping processes that can be conceptualized as discursive, strategic and contested (Snow & Benford, 2000: 623).

Collective action frames are generated by two basic discursive processes: frame articulation and frame amplification or punctuation.

Frame articulation involves the connection and alignment of events and experiences so that they associate and integrate in a relatively unified and compelling fashion. Fragments of observed, experienced, and/or recorded "reality" are assembled, collated, and packaged. What gives the resultant collective action frame its novelty is not so much the originality or newness of its ideational elements, but the manner in which they are spliced together and articulated, such that a new angle of vision, vantage point, and/or interpretation is provided.

The frame amplification process involves accenting and highlighting some issues, events, or beliefs as being more salient than others. These punctuated or accented elements may function in service of the articulation process by providing a conceptual prop for connecting diverse events and issues. The punctuated issues, beliefs, and events make prominent and represent the larger frame of which they are a part. This function can be manifested in movement slogans such as "Liberte, Fraternite, Egalilte," "Power to the People", "United We Save" and so on.

Frames are developed and deployed to achieve a specific purpose: to recruit new members, to mobilize adherents and demobilize opponents, to acquire resources, to gain media coverage and to effect political changes. Strategic efforts by social movement organizations to link their interests and interpretive frames with those of prospective constituents and actual or prospective resource providers were initially conceptualized as "frame alignment processes" (Snow et al 1986). Four basic alignment processes have been identified and researched: frame bridging, frame amplification, frame extension, and frame transformation.

Frame bridging involves to the linking of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem (Snow & Benford, 2000: 624). Bridging can occur between a movement and individuals, through the linkage of a movement organization with an unmobilized sentiment pool or public opinion cluster, or across social movements. This is among the most prevalent of framing strategies.

Frame amplification refers to the idealization, embellishment, clarification, or invigoration of existing values or beliefs (Snow & Benford, 2000: 624). Given that one of the key factors affecting whether or not a proffered frame resonates with potential constituents has to do with the extent to which the frame taps into existing cultural values, beliefs, narratives, folk wisdom, and the like, it is not surprising to find that most movements seek to amplify extant beliefs and values. And while frame amplification seems to be deemed necessary for most movement mobilizations, it appears to be particularly relevant to movements reliant on conscience constituents who are strikingly different from the movement beneficiaries and to movements that have been stigmatized because their beliefs and/or values contradict the dominant culture's core values.

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Frame extensions are a movement's effort to engage new adherents by expanding the scope of the proposed frame to include or encompass the views, interests, or sentiments of targeted groups. Frame extension entails depicting a SMO's interests and frame(s) as extending beyond its primary interests to include issues and concerns that are presumed to be of importance to potential participants (Snow & Benford, 2000: 625). Although movements often employ this alignment strategy, it is subject to various hazards and constraints. Frame extension activities spawned increases in intramural conflicts and disputes within movements regarding issues of ideological "purity," efficiency, and "turf." Movement framing processes are frequently contested and negotiated processes, not always under the tight control of movement elites, and that employing a particular alignment strategy does not always yield the desired results.

Frame transformation is a process required 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). Frame transformation refers to changing old understandings and meanings and/or generating new ones (Snow & Benford, 2000: 625).

The development, generation, and elaboration of collective action frames are contested processes. The player within the collective action arena who engage in this reality construction work are entangled in the politics of signification. This means that activists are able to construct and impose on their intended targets only certain versions of reality. There are three types of challenges: counterframing by movement opponents, bystanders, and the media; frame disputes within movements; and the dialectic between frames and events (Snow & Benford, 2000: 625).

Every social movement exists within a society where differences regarding the meaning of different aspects of reality are common. The opponents of the changes advocated by a movement sometimes publicly challenge the movement's diagnostic and prognostic framings. Attempts "to rebut, undermine, or neutralize a person's or group's myths, versions of reality, or interpretive framework" have been referred to as counterframing (Snow & Benford, 2000: 626). Opponents' counterframes, in turn, often determine reframing activity by the movement in order to contain, limit, or reverse potential damage to the movement's previous arguments or features.

The framing contests take place within complex, multi-organizational settings, and this circumstance affects social movements framing activity. One of the most extensively researched topics related to framing and counterframing disputes is the subject of collective action and media framing. Social movement activists cannot exercise much influence over the ways in which media organizations choose to cover protests or how the media construct the stories representing the movement activists' claims.

Framing contests not only take place between movements and their opponents, they can also occur internally. Intramovement dissensions concerning consensus mobilization (diagnostic and prognostic framing) known as "frame disputes" (Snow & Benford, 2000: 626), are mainly disagreements over reality (present or projected). Another type of controversy, referred to as "frame resonance disputes," entails disagreements regarding "how reality should be presented so as to maximize mobilization" *Ibidem*: 626).

The last form in which movement framings can be contested, and thus modified or transformed, concerns the dialectic tension between collective action frames and

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collective action events. The social movements repertoires of action have increasingly changed since the Internet and World Wide Web (della Porta & Diani, 2006: 170) and especially after social media platforms and smart phones have become popular.

3. Social Media and Social Movements

Internet provides protesters and activists with new tools and repertoires of action. Social media play an important role in facilitating the mobilization for, and coordination of, collective actions offline. An overemphasis on the Internet is present in some studies and mobile technologies and text messaging often play a very important role (Cammaerts, 2015: 5). Lowering the cost and increasing the efficiency of mobilization and coordination with a view to offline direct action is one of the main features of social networking sites and smart phones, enabling direct or real-time communicative practices.

A distinction should be made between Internet-supported and Internet-based social movements. The former employs traditional tools and tactics (mainly occupation of public spaces: demonstrations, marches, street blockades, etc.) and uses the internet especially for organization of the offline actions, while the latter exist exclusively online, using digital tactics (e.g. online petitions, e-mail bombings, virtual sit-ins, hacktivism, etc.). However, they can use common repertoires of action, such as culture jamming.

Social media enable activists and protest movements to negotiate and to disseminate digitally movement goals or frames faster, easier and cheaper. Moreover, social media provide wide opportunities for citizens and groups in society to circumvent state and market barriers and the mainstream media gatekeeping to construct alternative collective identities.

Social media tools support internal debate among social movement activists. Online social networks (especially Facebook) are used extensively and these platforms have emerged as essential parts of various movements, to such extent that many have started to use online platforms for interaction, debate, decision-making and recruitment (*Idem*).

Online platforms are used for real-time distribution of films and pictures of the direct actions and for exposing police violence. Moreover, social media can serve as a repository, a digital archive of texts, images, audio-video materials and other symbolic artifacts (ideas and communicative practices). Online tools and platforms can also contribute to the transnational diffusion of protest and mobilization efforts. However, there is no direct connection between online activity (e-mobilization) on social networks and the participation in actual offline protests, so the former is a weak predictor for the former.

Computer-mediated communication can serve as an invaluable resource for social movements, influencing and engaging large audiences, domestic as well as worldwide. Also, Facebook accounts for specific communities can facilitate the diffusion of contention offline and the dissemination of content online. Social networks are essential tools for the processes of frame alignment and for integrating various organization-specific and particular frames of different groups within the social movement master frames.

Social platforms can build online communities of people with common or compatible values and visions. Within the process of identity-building, the online

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communities espouse the development of new social movements, which are decentralized, dynamic, non-hierarchical, and unite participants identifying themselves with the movement's perspectives and objectives. Online communities construct themselves through a process of autonomous communication (Castells, 2015: 11).

Consequently, the digital protest communities create a new autonomous public space, which is the networked space between the online and the urban space (*Ibidem*: 10). Within this new hybrid space of freedom, the online tools enable a course from indignation to confidence and finally to contentious action. Protests 2.0 become effective only to the extent that they occupy a material urban space, by creating an external site, where the online community members can assemble when they want to become more engaged in the movement.

Facebook stimulates solidarity and coalition building, but it is not intended for activism and it encourages false consensus and conformism. Social media networks provide spaces for elaborating shared meanings, which social movements adherents and activists use extensively to stay in touch.

4. Conclusions

Framing is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient (prominent) in communicating messages, in such a way as to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Social movements are actively engaged in the production of ideas and meanings. This productive endeavor involves extension and development of current meanings, reconfiguration and revitalization of former meanings and the creation and construction of new meanings.

The concept of framing has been employed to illuminate how movements define problems (diagnostic framing), devise solutions to them (prognostic framing), and mobilize new followers for their cause (motivational framing).

Social media are playing an increasingly constitutive role in organizing social movements and in mobilizing on a transnational level. Online platforms have expanded and complemented social movement repertoires of collective action.

In the digital age, for a social movement to become effective there must be a mix of online and offline tactics, and offline real-world actions are mandatory.

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