ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES COURSE MODULE

Mass Communication and Media: Do News Frames Matter?
How are environmental issues related to energy, conservation, and consumption reported in the news?

- Energy use tied to consumption
- Rising levels of energy consumption have been tied to progress
- Energy consumption varies by place and culture

This slide includes screen shots of current news articles (2018, 2019) reporting on environmental issues surround energy usage, consumption, and conservation

Top left: *Eyewitness 3*

Middle: *Columbia Journalism Review (Media Watchdog Organization)*

Bottom left: *New York Times*


https://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/local_watchdogs.php

This slide gives an overview of the role of the press in America. Role of press is to be the symbolic Fourth Estate and act as watchdog over government and corporations. Provide objective and factual information. Furthermore, the primary role of press is to provide information on issues impacting citizens. Citizens then use this information to vote and partake in democratic process which can impact political policies and agendas.

Communication and media scholars will argue there is no news and information that is unframed; all news and information in newspapers and report reports uses language to socially construct meaning.

Both images are screen shots of news stories on CNN.com (a widely used mainstream news source). Note, the use of language in the headlines. The first headline uses the word epidemic and the second “save us”. Both headlines uses specific frames to communicate meaning to readers.

Frames in news construct meaning; journalists consciously (and arguably unconsciously) use language to construct meaning to issues and events.

Media scholars argue: language use, frames of interpretation, sources, objectivity, and democratic process all must be considered when reading a news.

Many journalists are committed to democracy and highly value the “public’s right to know”; committed to unearthing conflict and corruptions most people don’t see.

Committed to bringing public information and reporting the news without bias (want to objectively report without taking sides). Desire to be fair reinforced by editors as well.


Frames: what are they?

- Frames in communication
- Strategic word choice (Nisbet, 2009)
- Journalists select certain words, examples, images, messages, and sources
- Select which aspects of story to report on and even what issues should be covered
  - Shaped by ideologies of media producers

Frames:
Can be influential
Can offer specific interpretation of an issue or event
Journalists use frames and we use frames when interpreting news reports

Question for consideration: Why might a headline be framed with an economic frame? (Using an economic frame, such as one which represents consumers saving money) may induce people to read the article. Individual financial motives may be compelling for some news readers.


https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/22/this-homeowner-avoided-energy-guzzlers-for-more-efficient-options.html
Critical media scholars build on Entman’s work to draw attention to the hegemonic assumptions embedded in language and visuals.

News reports are intertwined in broader economic and political contexts.

Have students examine the two screen shots. How might language in the headline construct meaning?

1. How the word choice of epidemic construct public understanding of the efforts to combat plastic pollution?
2. Does the word choice “save us” imply a simplistic binary problem-solution understanding of climate change? Is if effective?
3. Do the headlines imply the problem is solvable?
Frames- why do they matter

- There is no such thing as unframed news and information
- Frames are constructed through communication (language)
- Language and word choice can shape public opinion

All news and information uses frames according to most media scholars. The headlines as well as the text of the news report. Each word choice matters according to media scholars. Frames represent information, including scientific information, in a specific way. Citizens use that information in many ways, from personal consumption choices to voting choices.

Question for consideration: How might the word choice in the above headline’s create meaning for the reader?
How much do we read in the news about environmental issues relating to energy, conservation, and consumption?

If we do not see a plethora of articles than how does that further impact the ways news reports communicate about these issues?

News representations tend to fall into official definitions and narratives. While we often see journalists quote officials and spokespersons in an effort to remain balanced and objective in their coverage, what impact might that have on the stories? Might it reduce an issue to two sides? Simplify it?

Many media scholars argue newspapers (businesses) are driven by profit motives and shaped by ideological positions of owners and editors (Kojola, 2017).

Stories produce our understanding of problems as well as viable solutions.

What is often not reported on has also become a focus for media scholars.

Do readers consume news and information passively? Do they question what they read?

How might a reader’s knowledge about an issue (or lack of knowledge) impact her or his interpretation of the news story?
All the news stories are important and should be covered.

Why would some people pay attention to a news story focused on the harm of air pollution to human health over harm to animals and eco-systems?

How might this impact what a journalist decides to cover in terms of environmental news and information?

How might socio-cultural, political, and geographic contexts determine which news frames are used in news reports? In other words, might it matter if a story is written for a local newspaper versus a mainstream newspaper? How might this impact how an environmental issue is reported on? And what frame is used?


Media literacy asks students to consider that messages are produced and manufactured.

News and media organizations are businesses that generate profit. – How might that impact what they report on and how frame headline and story?

News stories construct and express ideologies; perhaps of content producer. Important to note, when a journalist is striving for objectivity, many media scholars argue framing still takes place.

Who wrote this and why? Was there an economic motive? How might this influence future actions/policies? Was this informative? Did this provoke an emotional response?

(Beauchamp & Baran, 2020, 2017)
Core Concepts in News Frame Analysis

Language and Meaning

• Content (what ideas, values, ideologies, frames, perspectives and information are presented)
• Interpretations (how will people interpret story based on frames)

Remember, news creators can only select a handful of each day’s events to be covered in newspapers.

Thus, is even the selection to cover an event based on someone’s ideologies?

Should we be reading more about environmental issues in the news?
It’s useful to be critical of media reports and messages. When reading news and information we can evaluate what we consume by considering the frames as well as who or what is sourced.

https://www.cjr.org/analysis/olive-oil-times-climate-change.php

(Beauchamp & Baran, 2020, 2017)
Activity and application of concepts

- Application will allow students to:
  - find news articles from multiple sources
  - to examine frames and meaning construction
  - To discuss how these articles contribute meaning to public discourse

See worksheet for activity

Photo credit: Samantha Crown
References and Further Reading Suggestions


