



ENVIRONMENTAL HUMANITIES COURSE MODULE

Why Do Frames Matter?

Project Overview: In this assignment, students examine the coverage of a single event from two different points of view. They analyze the frames used in each report and determine how the journalist uses those frames to construct meaning and encourages a way of thinking about an environmental issue.

To begin, students (working individually) should identify an environmental issue surrounding energy, consumption, and conservation. They can find a topic using the search tools of Rowan University Library or an internet search using a combination of the following key terms (“Environment” “Energy” “Conservation” “Consumption”). Once a topic has been identified, the student should find two news articles covering the topic. The source of the first article should be from a larger more mainstream news outlet (examples include: The New York Times, Fox News, CNN, Chicago Tribune, Philadelphia Inquirer, The Washington Post etc). The source of the second article should be a more local or alternative news outlet (examples include: Lakota Country Times, a county newspaper such as Gloucester County Times, The Nome Nugget, Anchorage Daily News, Sacramento Bee etc.). Please note, some newspapers use wire services, so you may see very similar news stories about the same topic. If that happens, try to do an additional search using a different news source. For example, you could try using a website such as the BBC.

Specifications

- Each news article should be from a newspaper or news outlet. Do not use blogs or social media platforms for this activity
- Each article should be at least 500 words in length.

Objective 1: Application of Media Literacy Core Concepts

- Individually assess the news articles
 - Examine each article for frames (Use the table provided as reference guide)
 - You may also use the below questions to guide your analysis

Analysis Questions for Consideration

1. What frames are represented in the reports? Use the box below to consider how language is framing meaning. Consider how media makers' ideologies (belief systems, ideas, values) may impact how a news report is written. How might this also impact what is included in the report and how a journalist represents environmental issues?
2. Do the frames and language used in the news report impact a citizen's understanding of an environmental issue?
3. How do the concepts of "Audience & Origination," "Language & Meaning," "Representation of Reality" impact the content and credibility of the news report?

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| Frame | <p>The frames in a news story encourage a way of thinking about an issue; emphasize what is important/not important. The frames not included in the report are also important to consider (Gitlin, 1980). Frames can also promote a specific solution to a problem and guide how we think about issues (Entman, 1993). Ultimately it is the concepts news report focuses on.</p> <p><i>The below frames are ones common in news reports pertaining to environmental issues surrounding energy, conservation, and consumption. There can be multiple frames present in a report. Consider which frames are most noticeable and how they impact the way news and information is represented.</i></p> |
| Economic Frame | Report discusses environmental issues in relation to economic growth and investment factors. |
| Conservation | Report discusses problems relating to consumption, sustainability, energy efficiency, and protection of nature; Report discusses environmental threats connected to ignoring conservation efforts such as climate change, global warming, dangers connected to pipelines, pollution, endangered species, health and wellness. |
| Consumption | Report discusses the financial benefits consuming products on both a micro and macro level. |
| Conservation OR Consumption | Report discusses conservation and consumption as a binary. In other words, as competing interests. |
| Corporate Concerns & Jobs | Report discusses conservation efforts and environmental protection as a threat to corporate interests and jobs. |
| Science /Technology | Report discusses science and technology in relation to energy, conservation, and consumption. |
| Fatalism | Report discusses environmental issues and problems as no longer solvable. |
| Public Interest/Government Accountability | Report focuses on issues as they relate to citizens and everyday life. Report discusses governmental responsibility in relation to environmental issues. |
| Political | Report discusses political activity and politicians in relational to environmental issues. |
| Activism/Environmental Justice | Report discusses environmental issues in terms of environmental justice and activism. |
| Sources | Whose perspective is represented in story? Which sources are quoted? Are people from the local community quoted? |

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| Omission | Absence of coverage of all or part of a story involving environmental issues |
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Objective 2: Group Thematic Analysis

- After working individually, students can work in groups of 4 or 5 and collaborate to discuss their overall findings.

Analysis Questions for Consideration

1. As a group compare the frames represented in the news reports? Was there a difference between how the mainstream outlets represented information compared with the local outlets?
2. How do the frames and concepts of “Audience & Origination,” “Language & Meaning,” “Representation of Reality” impact knowledge production and a citizen’s understanding of the information?

Objective 3: Cultural Impact and Importance of Media Literacy

- After completing the small group discussion, a final question can be asked of the entire class. The question(s) for consideration is included below.

How can students, in their current positions as consumers of news and information, and later in life, in their career:

- Practice media literacy- which gives us control over meaning?
- Challenge and work to change problematic frames used in the production of news and information?

Make sure to include the source information for your news articles

References and Further Reading Suggestions

- Jonsson, A.M. (2011). Framing environmental risks in the Baltic Sea: A new media analysis. *Ambio*, 40(2), 121-132.
- Kojola, E. (2017). (Re)constructing the Pipeline: Workers, Environmentalists and Ideology in Media Coverage of the Keystone XL Pipeline. *Critical Sociology*, 43(6), 893-917.
- Newman, T.P. & Nisbet, M.C. (2015). Framing, the media, and environmental communication. In *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication* (pp.325-338). London: Routledge
- Nisbet, M.C. (2009). The ethics of framing science. In *Ethical and Metaphorical Dimensions*. (pp. 51-73). London: Routledge.
- Nisbet, M.C. (2009b). Communicating climate change: Why frames matter to public engagement. *Environment*, 51(2), 12-23.
- Nisbet, M.C. Hart, P.S., Myers, T. Ellithorpse, M. (2013). Attitude change in competitive framing environments? Open/Closed mindedness, framing effects, and climate change. *Journal of Communication*, 63, 766-785.