PRIMING AND FRAMING

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Medyanın Düşüncelerimizi Harekete Geçirme ve Konuları Çerçevelendirme Gücü

İletişim araştırmacıları, medyanın izleyiciler üzerindeki etkisini açıklamaya yarayan çeşitli iletişim çalışmalarına imzalarını atmışlardır. İngilizce literatürde, "priming" ve "framing analysis" olarak adlandırılan çalışmalar bunlardan yalnızca iki tanesidir. "Priming" medyanın izleyicilerin kafasındaki belli düşünceleri harekete geçirdiğini savunurken, "framing" de medyanın seçiciliği önem kazanır. Konunun çerçevelendirilmesi (framing)gündem oluşturmanın ikinci evresi olarak tanımlanabilir. "Priming" ile ilgili çalışmaların kaynağı kavramsal psikoloji iken, "framing"in kökenleri sosyoloji ve psikoloji bilimlerine uzanmaktadır. Her iki model de kitle iletişim araçlarının izleyiciler üzerinde güçlü ve geçici etkileri olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

<u>*Anahtar sözcükler:*</u> *Kitle iletişimi, kişilerarası iletişim kanalları, izleyiciler, medyanın seçicilik özelliği.*

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In their attempt to explain media's effects on audiences, researchers have used priming and framing analysis in addition to other models. Priming and framing can be described as second level agenda-setting. Priming has its origins in cognitive psychology, while framing is grounded in sociology and psychology. Both models argue that the effects of the mass media on audiences are powerful and transient. (Stone v.d. 1999: 276)

Priming

Priming focuses on "mental processing of the information supplied by the mass media." (Stone v.d. 1999: 280) The earliest study about priming was made by Jean Piaget in 1928 and it investigated the development of intelligence in children. Piaget argued that when the explainer and his listener have had similar preoccupations or ideas, then the words of explainer are understood since they fit into a schema already existing within the listener's mind. (Piaget 1959: 131)

Priming uses the biological theory that the human brain is a network composed of interconnected neurons or cells that process information. When a person is exposed to an image or sound, information travels through a network of brain cells and activates or triggers similar images that exist in the memory from previous experiences. The

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result of this spreading activation is called "priming effect." (Piaget 1959: 131) It is argued that priming is a stimulus-response perspective since the new media messages activate, stimulate, prime or trigger related or similar images that were stored previously in the mind. As a result, human brain connects new messages to what we have already known, producing the priming effect.

Priming effects can occur through interpersonal or mass media channels. For example, some researchers demonstrated that the ideas brought to mind by a verbal task can shape the participants' later impression of others. Under this perspective, Wyer and Srull (1981: 161-197) found that the use of aggression-related words in the sentence construction triggered participants' other aggressive thoughts, and these ideas led them to think hostile about the target person for some time afterward. In his study of priming effects of radio programs, Boemer found that the adult radio thriller programs were quite similar in violent content to prime-time action television, by suggesting that the radio depictions are capable of activating associated thoughts and actions. (Boemer 1984: 341)

We cannot assume that every media message creates priming effect and shapes the consequent behaviors of receivers of the messages. Priming effects are more likely to occur if certain conditions exist. These conditions are: (Bryant and Zillman 1994: 51-56)

1-The Communication's Meaning: This is the meaning that the individual has for the message or event. For example, aggression-related thoughts cannot be activated unless the depicted scenes are considered aggressive or violent by the viewers. In this context, Donnerstein and Berkowitz (1983) found that "the intensity of their male participants' punishment of a target woman who had provoked them earlier was significantly correlated with the rated aggressiveness of the movies they had seen before they could deliver the shocks."

2-Justifications or Justifiability of What is Communicated or Observed: The portrayed occurrence is more likely to activate aggressive or violent thoughts if the viewers think that the observed aggression is justified, morally proper, and likely to benefit the aggressor.

3-The Benefits that might be derived from the Communication or Observation: If the viewers interpret that the observed aggression's benefits are greater than its penalties, their violent or hostile thoughts are more likely to be activated.

4-Identification with the Characters: The viewers who identify with the actors they watch might imagine themselves as these characters and think of themselves as carrying out the depicted actions. As a result, the ideas and thoughts associated with this witnessed behavior are activated strongly. Leyens and Picus (1973:374-377) found that the angry men who imagined themselves as the person who won the filmed fight shown to them were later the most aggressive of all participants in the study toward the person who had insulted them.

5-The Reality of the Media Depiction or Circumstances: The influence of media depiction increases with the audience's involvement in the observed scene. If the viewers interpret the media's portrayal as

closer to real life circumstances, they are more likely to be influenced by the priming effects of the mass media. Atkin (1983: 615-621) found that fifth-and sixth-grade students who watched a realistic new portrayal of a fight received higher scores on aggression index than others who had seen the same story in a fantasy entertainment condition.

The activation of the related and similar thoughts in the brain through the new messages of the mass media or interpersonal channels occurs consciously or unconsciously. Bargh and Pietromonaco (1982: 437-449) found that even though the participants of their study had not been consciously aware of the priming words, the more hostility-related words to which they had been exposed, the more negative was their evaluation of the target person.

The priming effect of the messages can have a short (about a day) or long life, depending on how strongly they are absorbed. Berkowitz (1986: 93-106) advocated the short-run, temporary, and relatively transient effects of the media on the thoughts and actions of adults as well as children in the audience.

Association of the new messages with related or similar thoughts that were previously stored in the mind does not always lead to subsequent actions or feelings. These associative links sometimes support action tendencies, while some other times fail to support them. The strength of associative connections to lead the actions is determined by a variety of factors including contiguity, similarity and semantic relatedness. (Bryant and Zillman 1994: 45) Berkowitz (1989: 12) argued that under right circumstances and for a short period of time, ideas having an aggressive meaning can

evoke angry feelings and even aggression action tendencies. Based on this notion, he concluded that depictions of violence in the mass media increase the chances that people in the audience will act aggressively because of the priming effects.

As discussed here, media's violent depictions can lead to anti-social conducts in the real life by activating aggressive-related thoughts in the memory. However, portrayals of pro-social actions in movies, in television and radio programs, or on the printed page can activate ideas and thoughts that foster helpfulness, kindness, or other pro-social behaviors. (Bryant and Zillman 1994: 57) Thus, priming effects can be both positive and negative.

Researchers have argued that visual images are more effective to activate previously developed associative networks. Under this context, Iyengar and Kinder (1987) investigated the priming effect of television news coverage about the U.S. president. They reported that priming effects occurs because of media's selective coverage of issues. "Television news' selective coverage of events and issues activates mental process in its viewers and triggers only ideas related to the issues in the news."

Iyengar and Kinder further claimed that priming effects occur because people use shortcuts rather than complicated analyses when they faced with an issue. So, in their study, when people were asked to evaluate president, they used the information that comes to mind at the time of the assessment and this information came mostly from television.

Employing Iyengar and Kinder's model of priming, Pan and Kosicki investigated what

effects the media emphasis on the Gulf War vs. emphasis on the U.S. economy had on voters' evaluations of President George Bush's job performance. The researchers found that between 1990 and 1991, when the media focused on the Gulf War, Bush's overall rating was very high due to his successful handling of the Gulf War and foreign affairs. But when media changed its focus to the economic recession after the war, voters accorded significant weight to the economy and Bush's overall job performance ratings declined. This study revealed that priming effects are temporary and they fade away as the issue recedes into the background, and other dominant issues come to the fore. (Pan and Kosicki 1997: 3-30)

Yi (1993: 1-11) studied the contextual priming effects in print advertisements. He specifically focused on the moderating influences of prior knowledge on the degree to which contextual priming (the degree to which attributes are made accessible by the context) influences consumers' evaluations of products. Under this perspective, ad context (e.g., magazine articles or adjacent advertisements) can affect the interpretation of product information in the ad by priming or activating certain product attributes in consumers' knowledge. He found that contextual priming effects on brand attitudes and purchase intentions were pronounced among consumers with moderate product class knowledge and sharply diminished among consumers with low or high knowledge.

More recently, Domke, Shah, and Wackman (1998: 51-74) in their study of media priming effects, argued that media framing of issues in moral or ethical terms can prime voters to (1) make attributions about candidate integrity, and/or (2) evaluate other political issues in ethical terms. They concluded that media presentation of political issues, by selecting and emphasizing certain values while excluding others, is likely to influence which cognitions are activated as voters evaluate a political environment. In this process, the particular features of any issue and the specific values emphasized in media coverage should both interact with individuals' cognitions, resulting in clear differences in priming effects.

Usefulness of Priming Model: Emphasizing the associative link between new media messages and previously stored related thoughts and ideas, priming model offers an explanation for the subsequent behaviors of individuals. Based on this theory, anti-social or pro-social actions of audiences can be explained with the activation of aggressive-related or pro-social thoughts in the memory by the mass media's similar content.

Weaknesses of the Model: Not every person in the audiences is affected by new media messages. And the ones who are affected are not affected equally. What stimulates or appeals to one person may not affect another in the same way. So, attempting to explain the actions and behaviors of the individual based on only priming model does not always produce reliable results.

Framing

Framing is another aspect of the media's activity that can be influential in the shaping of people's perceptions. In framing model, media's selectivity gains importance. Framing is defined as "the activities of the mass media as they select, emphasize and present some aspects of 'reality' to audiences, while ignoring others." (Bateson 1972, in Stone et al. 1999: 277)

Gregory Bateson (1972), a psychiatrist, was the first person to use the concept of framing to describe human communication. Studying schizophrenics' behaviors, Bateson advanced the idea that context "frames" speech. According to him, schizophrenics misframe the messages or take them out of context and they fail to separate fantasy from reality. Schizophrenics simply cannot understand conventional framing messages. Bateson's perspective put communication messages in the context of cues. For example, the tone of voice in which a message is given frames the message, and by this way, people can understand the message more easily. (Stone v.d. 1999: 277)

Sociologist Gaye Tuchman (1978: 184) in her study of media construction of reality, reported that news, through its frame, inform people about themselves and others. She concluded, "news is perpetually defining and redefining, constituting and reconstituting social phenomena."

In communication research, Robert Entman (1993: 51-59)described the framing concept more widely. According to him, "framing is to select certain aspects of a perceived reality, highlight them and communicate them in a way that promotes particular version of problem, interpret its causes, passes moral judgment and suggests a remedy for the problem described." Entman argued that newsgathering is framing.

Reporters, when cover the news for print and broadcast media, use news frames. These news frames can be themes or styles that are used to get an appeal from audiences, and directly or indirectly affect their evaluation of the issues. From this aspect, news frames present specific perspectives or points of view. (Stone v.d. 1999: 278)

Pippa Norris (1995: 357) analyzed framing of the Cold War by the American news media. Employing Entman's definition of framing, she argued, "the Cold War frame highlighted certain events as international problems, identified their sources, passed judgments about the parties involved in the problem and recommended specific policy solutions."

Researchers have found that news frames affect the audiences' interpretation of news. Selectivity in the news coverage frames the mind of audiences by helping them categorize, label, and evaluate information. If people use news frames to process the news and retain items that are consistent with their previous knowledge, it is said, news frames influence audiences and affect their interpretations and judgements. Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997: 481-507) investigated the psychological effects of framing and found that "by activating certain concepts at the expense of others, news frames directly affect what enters the mind of audiences."

Reese and Buckalew (1995: 40-65) studied on the role of local television in framing the news coverage of a particular issue. They specifically focused on the framing of the Persian Gulf War by a local television and investigated how the "illusion of triumph" emerged at the community level as a result of framing practices of the media. The study argued that television, through frames of reference, played a major role in selling the crisis and in shaping the public support for a President's decision. Reese and Buckalew demonstrated that local news amplified the definitions of the Gulf policy advanced by

the government. The frames of reference produced by local news weakened anti-policy voices by criminalizing expressions of dissent and pitting them against—while aligning the pro-war side with—patriotism. As a result, the media created symbolic structure in which the illusion of triumph existed.

Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley (1997: 567-583) defined framing as the process by which a communication source, such as news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy. Their experiments examined the effect of news frames on tolerance for the Ku Klux Klan. They presented research participants with one of two local news stories about a Klan rally that varied by frame: One framed the rally as a free speech issue, and the other framed it as a disruption of public order. Their findings indicated that participants who viewed the free speech story expressed more tolerance for the Klan than participants who watched the public order story. They concluded that frames affect tolerance by altering the perceived importance of public order values.

More recently, Ashley and Olson (1998: 263-77) documented the negative framing of the modern women's movement. They found that women's movement was rarely covered by the press, and when it was, it was treated with humor and puzzlement. Based on this finding, they concluded that the use of such framing practices by the mass media about women's movement can motivate audiences to think that women and their rights are not newsworthy.

A similar study to Ashley and Olson's was made by Zoch and Turk in 1998. Zoch and Turk examined one of the important dimensions of framing: choice of information source, that is, the selections journalists make from among the many possible and potential holders of information. The study specifically focused on the inclusion of female sources in newspaper stories and gender of a reporter. The authors claimed that the absence of women as sources would reflect their powerlessness, their symbolic annihilation by the media. The study demonstrated that women were infrequently cited as sources by newspapers, a signal to the reader that they are relatively unimportant in both public and private sector activities and events. Therefore, a media consumer might infer that this lack of importance is the result of women not holding positions of authority and/or their lack of credible, valuable information. This lead them to believe that news is made and information controlled by men acting in some official capacity, with official status. This frame calls attention away from women, and to what men do and say. (Zoch and Turk 1998: 762-775)

Strengths and Weaknesses of Framing:
By framing issues in their news coverage, the media can set us up to think about some particular issues and to interpret them. Through news frames, the media has the power to shape audiences' perceptions in a way that they want. From this perspective, framing can be a conscious manipulation. However, the media can also use framing unconsciously, for example, in the analyses and discussions of issues. Framing can be argued as a powerful weapon of the media in shaping the judgments and interpretation of audiences about issues, but it cannot be the only weapon in that context. Because perceptions of all things depend also on other factors such as our socialization, background, culture, and life experiences.

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