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The End of Framing as we Know it . . . and the Future of Media Effects

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Framing has become one of the most popular areas of research for scholars in communication and a wide variety of other disciplines, such as psychology, behavioral economics, political science, and sociology. Particularly in the

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communication discipline, however, ambiguities surrounding how we conceptualize and therefore operationalize framing have begun to overlap with other media effects models to a point that is dysfunctional. This article provides an in-depth examination of framing and positions the theory in the context of recent evolutions in media effects research. We begin by arguing for changes in how communication scholars approach framing as a theoretical construct. We urge scholars to abandon the general term "framing" altogether and instead distinguish between different types of framing. We also propose that, as a field, we refocus attention on the concept's original theoretical foundations and, more important, the potential empirical contributions that the concept can make to our field and our understanding of media effects. Finally, we discuss framing as a bridge between paradigms as we shift from an era of mass communication to one of echo chambers, tailored information and microtargeting in the new media environment.

Framing has emerged as one of the most popular areas of research for scholars in communication. For evidence of this, one need look no further than our conference programs or the pages of our flagship journals (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press). Yet despite the attention paid to the concept, framing is arguably less clear now than at any point in its history. The ambiguity around the concept begins with a lack of consistency around how the concept is defined or how these definitions connect with the explanatory models underlying the theory (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

The communication literature is rife with different conceptualizations of frames and framing. Druckman (2001), for instance, listed no fewer than seven definitions of the concept. These range from frames as "principles of organization" (Goffman, 1974, p. 10) to frames as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation" (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Sweetser and Fauconnier (1996) defined frames as "structured understandings of the way aspects of the world function" (p. 5), whereas Capella and Jamieson (1997) offered a definition more directly tied to journalism, arguing that framing is the manner in which a "story is written or produced" (p. 39).

The implications of these varied definitions are twofold. First, there is considerable disagreement over what exactly constitutes framing. This is perhaps most readily apparent in the different operationalizations of the concept, particularly between equivalence framing, a form of framing that involves manipulating the presentation of logically equivalent information, and emphasis framing, a form of framing that involves manipulating the content of a communication (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press). Second, our field has created an understanding of framing that overlaps with a number of other conceptual models, including priming, agenda-setting and persuasion, and related concepts such as schemas and scripts. This conceptual overlap has left scholars with an incomplete understanding of the framing

concept both in terms of its theoretical boundaries and, again, methods of operationalization. The result has been movement away from a rigid conceptualization of framing toward one that captures a wide range of media effects, which has little to no actual explanatory power and which provides little understanding of the mechanisms that distinguish it from other media effects concepts.

Currently, the field of communication produces dozens of framing studies each year, many of which have little to do with the original conception of framing. Rather than continuing along this path toward a definition of framing that encompasses virtually all types of persuasive effects and therefore has extremely limited utility for media effects scholars, we use this article to propose clarifications to the framing literature and to signal opportunities for advancing our understanding of the concept in the new media environment.

First, we suggest that scholars abandon the general "framing" label altogether and rely on more specific terminology when discussing their work and the media effects models underlying it. Second, and following from the previous point, we argue that, as a field, we must do a much better job of distinguishing between different types of framing, most notably emphasis and equivalence framing. Third, we propose an overall refocusing on the concept, one that examines framing in terms of its original theoretical foundations and proposed mechanisms, and most important the potential empirical contributions that the concept can make to our understanding of media effects. Finally, we outline opportunities for future framing effects research as we move into a new paradigm of media effects research.

THE CONCEPT OF FRAMING: WHAT IT IS AND ISN'T

The framing concept can be found in the literature of a number of disciplines, but it is most commonly traced back to a pair of largely unrelated traditions of thinking in psychology and sociology. Kahneman and Tversky (1979, 1984) are considered the pioneers of framing in the field of psychology, with Kahneman winning a Nobel Prize in economics for their joint work in 2002. Tversky and Kahneman's (1981) oft-cited "Asian disease" study, for instance, looked at how people respond to otherwise equivalent information that is presented in terms of gains versus losses. The authors provided participants with a story about a hypothetical outbreak of an unusual Asian disease that threatened to kill 600 people. Participants were then asked to choose between a set of alternative options for dealing with the disease. People were decidedly more risk averse when

presented outcomes in terms of gains (lives saved) but risk seeking when that same information was presented in terms of losses (lives lost).

The authors were able to replicate this work across a variety of issues (see, e.g., Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), with the results consistently demonstrating that human choice is contingent on the description of choice problems, or how information is contextualized, rather than the expected utility of those options. This conclusion is perhaps best summarized by Kahneman (2003) himself when he described perception as "reference dependent" (p. 459). Work in the vein of Kahneman and Tversky has been labeled equivalency framing because it relies upon different but logically equivalent words or phrases to produce the framing effect (Druckman, 2001). In other words, psychology-rooted framing refers to variations in *how* a given piece of information is presented to audiences, rather than differences in *what* is being communicated.

The sociological beginnings of framing can best be traced back to Goffman (1974) and, later, to Gamson and colleagues (Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, & Rucht, 2002; Gamson, 1985, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, 1989). Driven in part by concerns about the ecological validity of equivalence-based framing work, the sociological tradition views framing as a means of understanding how people construct meaning and make sense of the everyday world (Ferree et al., 2002). Goffman (1974) described framing as a method by which individuals apply interpretive schemas to both classify and interpret the information that they encounter in their day-to-day lives, whereas Gamson and Modigliani (1987) defined frames as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events. . . . The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue" (p. 143).

Unlike the equivalence-based definition of framing, this sociologically rooted definition moves framing outside of the presentation of logically equivalent information and into territory where the selection of one set of facts or arguments over another can be deemed a frame. As a result, more leeway is granted to the framing definition in the sociological tradition, with studies often manipulating *what* an audience receives rather than *how* equivalent information is presented. As work in this vein often involves emphasizing one set of considerations over another, this sociologically oriented approach to framing has been labeled "emphasis framing." Of importance, this sociological tradition helped galvanize framing work by expanding the scope of studies that could fall under the framing label. This included, for instance, a growth of emphasis framing studies in communication focusing on thematic framing, which involves placing an issue in a general context, and episodic framing, which treats an issue more singularly and without the context of its thematic-based counterpart (Iyengar, 2005).

CONCEPTUAL OVERLAP BETWEEN FRAMING
AND RELATED CONCEPTS?

An important by-product of the expanded definition of framing brought about by the sociological-rooted tradition has been that the term is often applied to similar but distinctly different theoretical concepts. For instance, Minsky (1975) discussed a frame as a cognitive template or data structure that organizes information in the mind. This description is not unlike what other scholars have identified as ''schemas'' or ''scripts'' (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Rumelhart, 1984; Schank & Abelson, 1977), concepts that help explain how individuals cope with the sheer volume of information that is encountered on a day-to-day basis (Wicks, 1992).

Other disagreements have emerged over the distinctness of framing as compared to other related communication theories. Framing has been said to overlap with or, in some cases, be subsumed by theories like priming and agenda-setting (e.g., McCombs, 2004; McCombs & Ghanem, 2001). The bulk of the overlap concerning these disparate communication theories has to do with issues of applicability and accessibility—specifically, a confusion over whether framing is based on an applicability or accessibility model. Entman's (1993) early definition of framing is built around ideas of selection and salience and—unfortunately—is often used incorrectly to subsume other media effects models under the framing label. Frames, for Entman, ''highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience'' (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

Entman's definition positions framing as a product of accessibility as opposed to applicability, and his definition is largely aligned with numerous other salience-based definitions in the literature. For instance, Gitlin (1980) argued that frames are a means of presentation whereby certain elements of the communicated text are emphasized or excluded by the communicator. These definitions, as well as others not noted here, suggest that framing operates by making some aspect of a problem or communication more accessible, visible, or salient to an audience.

Of course, agenda-setting and priming are also based on models featuring accessibility as a central construct. Agenda-setting refers to the idea that media tell people what to think about based on issues being covered more frequently or more prominently. By doing so, the media transfers salience to audiences. In many ways priming can be thought of as an extension of the agenda-setting process (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming theories are based largely on models of memory as a network of interconnected cognitive structures or nodes that are used in the storage, retrieval, and use of information (Anderson, 1985; Collins & Loftus, 1975; Collins & Quillian, 1969).

The concept of ''spreading activation'' explains a process whereby media coverage serves to increase the salience of an issue in a person's mind, resulting in that issue being more likely to serve as a standard by which related issues are evaluated (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Put differently, priming is the process of activating a particular construct in memory resulting in that construct becoming more available and influential in subsequent thinking (Ratcliff & McKoon, 1988).

The spreading activation theory of priming is based on assumptions of attitude accessibility and a memory-based model of information processing (Scheufele, 2000). The theory assumes that people organize perceptions of their surroundings into mental knowledge clusters and that at any given moment certain pieces of information or clusters are more accessible than others (Kim, Scheufele, & Shanahan, 2002). Models of agenda-setting and priming therefore assume that individuals form attitudes based on the most salient considerations at the time of decision making (Hastie & Park, 1986; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Perhaps not surprising, the use of salience-based definitions of framing has allowed some to draw linkages between framing, priming, and agenda-setting. This school of thought, trained mostly in the McCombs/ University of Texas–Austin tradition, grouped the three theoretical models together around the central concept of agenda-setting and the salience-based explanations that underlie it. McCombs and Ghanem (2001), for example, argued that salience is the key feature of framing and that this makes framing research little more than a subset or extension of agenda-setting work.

Other researchers are more concerned about subsuming a growing number of media effects models under a simplified salience-based umbrella. Price, Tewksbury, and Powers (1997), as well as Scheufele (2000), therefore argued for the distinctiveness of framing as a research area worthy of attention. These authors, and others not listed here, contend that agenda-setting and priming involve a different set of cognitive processes than those required by framing. Although agenda-setting and priming are said to rely on the notion of attitude accessibility (salience), framing is rooted in Gestaltpsychologie and attribution theory, which explored the tendency among people to detect patterns in pieces of information that were consistent with preexisting cognitive schemas (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press). As a result, framing operates based on applicability effects that invoke particular interpretive schemas, which then determine how information is processed (Scheufele, 2000). Put simply, how information is presented or framed will influence the schema called upon to process that information. This second school of thought has lobbied for a return to a more rigid and narrow equivalency-based definition of framing.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY–APPLICABILITY DISTINCTION

The accessibility–applicability distinction is crucial to our understanding of framing effects on at least three fronts. First, as noted, Entman's (Entman, 1991, 1993) definition of framing played an important role in galvanizing framing work in communication. His 1993 piece, which uses a salience-based measure of framing based on the emphasis and selection of facts of news articles in media, has been cited nearly 1,500 times according to a Web of Science search. Unfortunately, this salience-based definition of framing is too loose to have practical value, as it makes it possible to argue that any number of differences in communication constitute a difference in framing. First, his framing measure and much of his own empirical work on the topic (e.g., Entman, 1991) overlap with early studies in agenda-setting (e.g., McCombs & Shaw, 1972), which makes it difficult to isolate framing effects from those based on agenda-setting. Perhaps more problematic, emphasis-based studies push framing into a more general category of persuasion where any observed effects may be the result of differences in the persuasive power or quality of a given message, rather than differences in the way the same information is presented. Again, the result is ambiguity in terms of what constitutes framing as the concept is difficult to differentiate from other salience-based theories of media effects.

Second, the accessibility–applicability distinction is important for our understanding of the mechanisms behind framing, priming, and agenda-setting. One can reasonably assume that accessibility effects (priming and agenda-setting) will operate, at least to some degree, among all members of a population (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press). A news article about, for example, a nuclear disarmament treaty should make that topic more salient among all who happen to read it, even if factors such as preexisting knowledge levels might moderate such effects. In other words, simple exposure to a set of considerations should increase the salience of those considerations across all parties, regardless of prior experience with the information. The same cannot be said about applicability effects as an audience member's preexisting cognitive schema or knowledge structures will determine the degree to which a frame will resonate. The presence of a cognitive schema that matches the frame should produce a framing effect, whereas a mismatch between frame and schema should fail to produce such an effect. It has been argued that disentangling the different mechanisms underlying priming, agenda-setting, and framing are critical for the trajectory of research in each of these different areas (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). However, this is especially difficult for salience-based definitions of

framing, as the mechanisms behind framing are thought to be the same as those underlying each of priming and agenda-setting.

Third, the sociologically based definition not only threatens to make framing a redundant communication concept but also pushes the field of communications toward an outdated and possibly unwarranted model of media effects that subsumes most effects under a broad persuasive framing umbrella and abandons what McQuail (2005) called a ''constructed reality'' paradigm. This paradigm has been built on the belief that mass media has *potentially* strong effects on attitudes and information processing but that any effects were contingent on a host of individual-level characteristics (McQuail, 2005). As just discussed, accessibility effects, those mechanisms by which priming and agenda-setting are believed to operate, are considered more ubiquitous than framing effects, which should manifest only among audiences with a schema that matches a given framing manipulation.

As a result, this loose definition of framing has undoubtedly contributed to making framing effects appear as much more widespread and powerful than they actually are. This conceptual overreach tends to manifest itself in two areas. First, countless new self-identified framing studies are focused on identifying different categories of frames in communication content. After more than four decades of framing research, one would expect these studies to operate at least in part deductively and explore frames that previous research has shown to resonate well with culturally shared schemas among audiences. Especially in the communication discipline, however, there seems to be little consistency across studies in the types of content (or ''framing'') categories identified. Instead, many studies continue to inductively explore issue-specific content categories or even use clustering techniques to mine content data for what they call ''frames,'' with little conceptual concern for how these content categories would impact audiences within a framing effects model.

As argued elsewhere (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press), this conceptual fuzziness severely limits the usefulness of the framing concept for our discipline. Using the framing label to describe virtually any issue-related content category has muddled the concept to the point where it is indistinguishable from other effects models, including a host of persuasive media effects. This problem is particularly salient for studies that are explicitly concerned with testing framing effects in experimental settings. Unless these studies are able to conceptually and operationally disentangle salience-based or persuasive effects, on one hand, and framing-based presentation effects, on the other hand, most of the effects they identify are likely confounded and tap different effects models at the same time without being able to disentangle their unique contribution to the criterion variable.

As a result, findings falsely attributed to framing may signify an unnecessary and unwarranted return to the media effects paradigms of the past. This is not to say that framing is not a powerful theory of communication but rather that ubiquitous framing effects downplay the role of cognitive schema in producing framing effects. Instead of looking backward toward such models, we argue that framing theory can act as a bridge forward to a fifth, new paradigm of media effects for our new media environment. We expand upon this point shortly, but first we make the case that a paradigm shift is in order for framing itself.

TOWARD A PARADIGM SHIFT IN FRAMING RESEARCH

Given the conceptual and operational confusion that surrounds the framing concept, we believe a paradigm shift is in order for scholars working in this area. Our scattered conceptualization of framing has resulted in a disjointed literature on the subject. In the current communication literature, framing effects can be used to explain nearly everything, thereby making the concept essentially meaningless for communication scholars. As a result, we need to reevaluate framing and all that we think we know about the concept.

The first step in this process is to return to a more rigid and rigorous definition of framing effects. Most notably, this means moving away from emphasis framing operationalizations that blur the lines between frames and primes, media agendas, and other informational or persuasive features of a message. Instead, we propose framing research be both terminologically and conceptually refocused around equivalence-based definitions that are more directly tied to alterations in the presentation of information rather than the persuasive value of that information. Although this narrows the scope of framing work, by eliminating emphasis-based manipulations, it should not be read as an attempt to stifle framing research. Quite the contrary, we view this as an opportunity to expand the ways by which we produce equivalence frames. These might include movement away from text-based framing manipulations and movement toward frames based on nonverbal or visual cues (for an overview, see Scheufele & Iyengar, in press).

Second, we propose a renewed interest in the mechanisms behind framing research. Although framing studies have exploded in recent years, the exact process behind the phenomenon remains a contentious issue, and one for which only a limited amount of research exists. We argue that the best way to understand framing is to explicate the mechanisms behind the phenomenon (as well as related phenomena such as priming and agenda-setting). Moreover, the most fruitful way of pursuing these ends is to pay greater attention to the historical and theoretical foundations of these concepts.

According to Price et al. (1997), a ''framing effect is one in which salient attributes of a message (its organization, selection of content, or thematic structure) render particular thoughts applicable, resulting in their activation and use in evaluations'' (p. 486). Their conceptualization suggests that the act of reading a news article will determine which stored knowledge structure (or schema) becomes active. In turn, the activated knowledge structure will be used to interpret the news article. In this respect, choices made by journalists and editors can play a role in determining the cognitive schema that a reader will apply to a news story.

One of the operational problems associated with framing and related research, however, is that it can often prove difficult to isolate framing effects from agenda-setting and priming effects. This is because issues tend to be framed in a consistent manner as they emerge on the public agenda (Downs, 1972). This is in part due to the journalistic norms associated with the issue-attention cycle, but also because journalists, just like everyone else, learn about issues in large part based on the frames that are used to define them.

Nonetheless, efforts have been made to distinguish framing from its accessibility-based counterparts. In fact, one of the seminal studies of framing in a media effects context started from this premise and demonstrated that news story frames can influence attributions of responsibility related to terrorism (Iyengar, 1987). Specifically, when news stories about terrorism focused on isolated cases or events, respondents were more likely to attribute responsibility to the individual terrorists. Conversely, when news stories linked terrorism events to a more general political context, respondents were more likely to attribute responsibility elsewhere, advocating for more social reform to combat the issue. This work fits with Price and Tewksbury's (1997) conceptualization of framing and priming effects, as it suggests the ''knowledge activation potential of news story frames'' (p. 500). Moreover, it shows that the frames used in news stories provide the context that shapes subsequent understanding of the news. What this study fails to do, however, is differentiate the *mechanisms behind* framing and priming or chronic accessibility.

As theirs is the most promising model for differentiating the mechanisms of priming, framing, and agenda-setting, scholars should devise research to test the ideas put forth in Price and Tewksbury's (1997) knowledge activation model, specifically those concerning the mechanisms underlying framing, priming, and agenda-setting. Research that takes advantage of advances in response latency measures might be one method of doing so, as latency measures can provide tests of the accessibility of constructs in memory. Similarly, experiments that leverage the power of chronically accessible constructs, while providing frames that either match or fail to

match the preexisting cognitive schemas of participants, might be another method of tapping into the differences between accessibility and applicability in this domain. Regardless of the specific approach, attention should be paid to the foundations of these three media effects models and the unique mechanisms underlying each.

FRAMING AND A NEW PARADIGM OF FRAMING EFFECTS RESEARCH

The advent of new media and Web 2.0 technologies, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other forms of social networking, is forcing communication scholars to rethink traditional effects models (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008).

Our field has long been characterized by a Kuhnsian (Kuhn, 1962) oscillation between paradigms of strong and weak media effects (McQuail, 2005; see Figure 1). The magic bullet or hypodermic needle models before World War II were based on assumptions about direct, uniform, and powerful persuasive effects that did not undergo significant empirical tests in real-world settings.

In response to these simple stimulus-response models, Lazarsfeld and his colleagues (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1948) collected large-scale panel survey data from multiple communities to
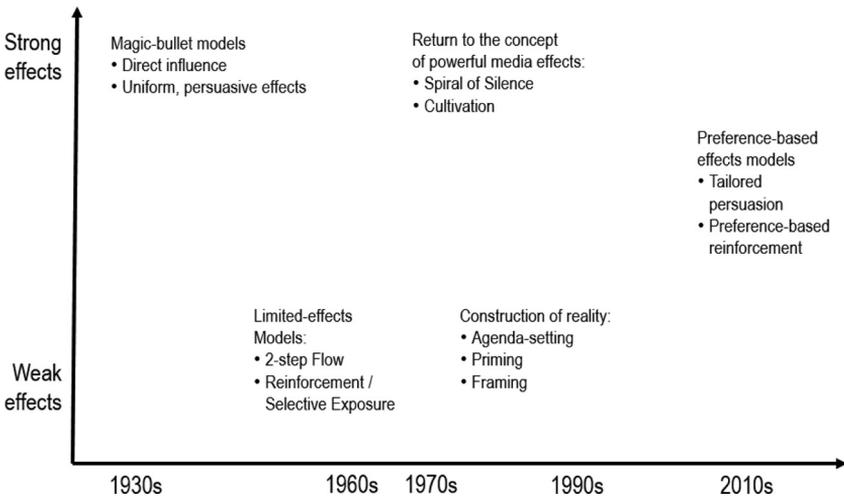

FIGURE 1   A chronology of media effects paradigms.

examine opinion change during U.S. election campaigns. Eventually rejecting many of the assumptions of the magic bullet paradigm, this second paradigm of effects models concluded that media effects were limited due to two factors. First, Lazarsfeld and colleagues found that opinion change was not triggered directly by mass media but occurred indirectly, mediated by influential opinion leaders who were more likely to attend to mass-mediated messages and—in turn—passed on messages to other members of their social network. In addition, Lazarsfeld and colleagues concluded, media effects were minimal because they largely reinforced existing partisan attitudes among voters who selectively exposed themselves to content that fit their prior beliefs.

In the early 1970s, Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann (1973) announced a third paradigm of media effects with her call for a "return to the concept of powerful mass media." Her work on the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1973, 1974, 1984) and Gerbner's cultivation studies (Gerbner & Gross, 1974; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 2002) shared two important assumptions about media. Mass-mediated messages, both Noelle-Neumann and Gerbner argued, might have much stronger effects than Lazarsfeld and his colleagues assumed in a pretelevision age, given the ubiquitous and consonant nature of media messages. Frequent exposure to consonant mediated messages can therefore shape our perceptions of what everyone else around us thinks (Noelle-Neumann, 1984) but also of what the world around us looks like (Gerbner & Gross, 1974).

McQuail's fourth and final paradigm had its theoretical roots in the 1970s but really came to fruition in the 1980s and 1990s. Concepts, such as priming, agenda-setting, and framing, posited that mass media had *potentially* strong effects on attitudes and information processing but that these effects were contingent on individual-level characteristics, including value predispositions and cognitive schema (McQuail, 2005).

Rapidly changing media environments and evolving audience behaviors within these environments, however, have begun to push into what we identify as a fifth current paradigm of media effects research: preference-based effects models. As illustrated in Figure 1, preference-based models combine elements of strong and weak effects models.

The most coherent argument for weak preference-based effects models has been put forth by Bennett and Iyengar (2008). In their essay on a new area of minimal effects, as they called it, they summarized growing evidence from psychology, political science, and media effects research suggesting that an increasingly fragmented (online) news environment will match up audiences primarily with information that fits their prior beliefs. As a result, media effects in these new information environments might be limited to what we call preference-based reinforcement in Figure 1.

Preference-based reinforcement is driven by three related phenomena: (a) a motivation among media outlets to narrowcast information toward ideologically fragmented publics (Maddow, 2010) or even toward specific individuals in the case of Facebook or other social media (Scheufele & Nisbet, 2012) in order to create more lucrative advertising environments; (b) a tendency among individual audience members to not just select (Yeo, Xenos, Brossard, & Scheufele, 2015) and interpret (Kunda, 1990) information consistently with their prior beliefs, but also to rely on highly homophilic self-selected online social networks—often labeled "echo chambers" (Sunstein, 2007) or "filter bubbles" (Pariser, 2011)—that further narrow our information diets and interpretation of new information; and (c) new interface of media and audiences, such as tailored results from search engines (Ladwig, Anderson, Brossard, Scheufele, & Shaw, 2010) or personalized news aggregators, that lead to narrower and narrower information tailoring based on information infrastructures that are informed by both voluntary and involuntary user input.

In addition to evidence pointing toward more limited, reinforcement-based effects, however, preference-based effects models might also open up new ways of thinking about strong media effects. In Figure 1, we subsumed these approaches under the label "tailored persuasion." In many ways, they are similar to the idea of personalized medicine, that is, treatments that are tailored toward a patient's genome or other characteristics and therefore are much more effective than traditional medicines or treatments would be.

On an anecdotal level, the realities of modern election campaigns are a good example of this new idea of tailored persuasion. In the 2012 presidential race, for instance, Barack Obama employed a team of statisticians and social media strategists to mine large amounts of data on individual voters in order to develop more effective modes of persuading voters to adopt issue stances, donate money, or turn out on Election Day (Issenberg, 2012). There is also some initial experimental evidence suggesting that the same tendency to self-select into highly homogenous social networks that produces preference-based reinforcement, as just discussed, might also promote the exchange of belief-inconsistent information among audiences once that information does enter their network. As Messing and Westwood (2012) summarized their findings:

> In the context of the diverse social, work, school, and intergenerational familial ties maintained via online networking websites, the odds of exposure to counterattitudinal information among partisans and political news among the disaffected strike us as substantially higher than interpersonal discussion or traditional media venues. (p. 17)

As a result, the same online environments that can produce more reinforcement effects as part of a "preference-based effects" paradigm might

also produce audience-media interactions that in fact increase the likelihood of belief-inconsistent persuasive messaging reaching audience members.

Most important in the context of this article, however, is the role that framing can play in the context of tailored persuasion. In other words, is it possible to increase the effectiveness of a message by changing the way the information is presented and—therefore—which cognitive schema audiences use when making sense of the information? The most convincing evidence that this might be possible has been provided by Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, and Collins (2008). Their experimental work showed that photoshopped images of hypothetical candidates that integrated facial features of the viewer (without him or her being aware) produced significantly higher likability ratings than unedited images. As argued elsewhere (Scheufele & Iyengar, in press), the mechanisms behind this effect are very similar to applicability-based framing effects. Simply by embedding the information in a familiar (visual) context, the researchers were able to evoke different interpretive schemas and, as a result, produce more persuasive messages. The idea of visual framing continues to be underexplored, however, especially in light of a new tailored persuasion paradigm.

In closing, we are not ready to declare framing completely dead yet. We do argue, however, that a much narrower conceptual understanding of framing is the only way for our discipline to move forward in this area of effects research in ways that (a) produce meaningful intellectual contributions to our field and (b) do not render the contributions from media effects research irrelevant to behavioral economics, psychology, sociology and other disciplines from which the concept has been borrowed in the first place.

At the very minimum, this means that media effects research should abandon the general term "framing" as a catch-all phrase for a number of distinct media effects models and replace it with the more precise terminological distinction between equivalence and emphasis framing. This will not only help resolve some of the terminological confusion that has surrounded framing research for decades (Scheufele, 1999) but also help clarify the very distinct mechanisms that underlie both models. As we begin to explore the new paradigm of preference-based effects models, (visual) equivalence framing may be crucial in helping us understand strong media effects, in spite of media fragmentation and filter bubbles. Researchers in the area of emphasis frames, however, will be increasingly faced with the challenge of distinguishing their understanding of framing effects from other persuasive media effects mechanisms in these new communication environments.

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