FRAMES OF SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS: STRUCTURE AND FORMATION FEATURES

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Article History: Received on 15th October 2019, Revised on 27th November 2019, Published on 21st December 2019

Abstract

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this article is to determine the features of the framing process, taking into account the methodological basis of the theory of frames.

Methodology: The methodological basis of the study is a theory of frames, as well as various methodological approaches aimed at searching for meaning, analyzing the characteristics of social consciousness, forming social representations. In order to clarify the issue of the formation and structure of a frame of social representations, theoretical-methodological concepts of a frame (Goffman, Bateson, Minsky, Fillmore) and social representations (Moscovici, Neisser) are analyzed. The main provisions of the structural-functional approach, the theory of social interactionism and constructivism are used.

Main Findings: The main provisions of the structural-functional approach, the theory of social interactionism and constructivism are used. As a result of analyzing the structure of frames of social representations, the author’s interpretation of the process of their formation is given, which makes it possible to better understand people’s understanding of already widespread and accepted social representations. Additions to the current understanding of the framing process and its nature allow for the applied research of social representations that underlie the studied social actions. The findings presented in the article, first of all, the conceptualization of basic concepts and generalization of extensive analytical material can serve as a prerequisite for further disciplinary (philosophy, sociology, political science, psychology, and others) and interdisciplinary developments in the field of frame research, monitoring and comparative research.

Applications of this study: The stated results can be used in analyzing the process of forming and determining the structure of frames of social representations.

Novelty/Originality of this study: The originality of the study lies in the author's interpretation of the formation of the frame of social representations, it's content and nature.

Keywords: Frame, Frame Analysis, Framing, Social Representations, Frames of Social Representations, Frame Structure.

INTRODUCTION

Demand in social analysis practices, including frame analysis, attracts particular attention of modern researchers. Traces of the theory of frames can be found in sociology, linguistics, psychology, cybernetics and in research on artificial intelligence. This is an interdisciplinary phenomenon and, accordingly, there are various approaches to it, which gradually formed two main directions, developing in parallel, almost without intersecting. The first, the so-called cybernetic-linguistic direction, is associated primarily with the names of Minsky (1979) and Fillmore (1988). According to the second sociological-psychological approach (Goffman (1974) and Bateson (1972)), a frame was initially defined as a meta-communicative formation, independent of its content and message context.

Gradually, in the works of Goffman, a definition has emerged that is currently used in sociology: a frame is simultaneously a synonym for the situation and its definition, as well as a matrix of possible events in this situation. In addition, Goffman suggested that a frame may contain such function as a means of situation interpretation. The works of Goffman became (and continue to be) a subject of numerous interpretations (Goffman, 2004).

In Russian science, the theory of frames is more often viewed not as an applied concept, but as a direction of fundamental knowledge. At the turn of the 21st century, interest in classical works increased – the works of Goffman, Bateson, Minsky, Fillmore and other authors were translated or republished. Such scientists, for example, Vakhshtayn (2007), Volkov (1997), Tsurikova (2001), Pochepstsoy (2001), analyze in their works the methodological background of the theory of frames, which are further used in studies devoted to the frame analysis.

Despite the availability of works devoted to defining a frame, its structure and various aspects of framing, using the concept of frame analysis to study various aspects of social practices (Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017), Johansson (2007), Yanow and van Hulst (2011)), the issue of forming a frame of social representations and its structure is underdeveloped.

METHODS

The concept of a frame is widely used in disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. At the same time, in order to expand
the possibilities of theoretical and empirical understanding of this phenomenon, it is important to clarify the process of forming a frame of social representation and its structure.

In this article, in the context of scientific ideas about a frame, genesis, and content of social representations, the definition of "a frame of social representations" is clarified, special attention is paid to the analysis of its structure and formation features for developing operationally relevant definitions of this category and its structural components for further research.

The work widely uses the methodological tools of the interactionist, constructionist and cognitive approaches. The theoretical-methodological basis of the thesis is a set of frame concepts (a socio-psychological frame – Goffman and Bateson; a cybernetic-linguistic frame – Minsky, and Fillmore) and social representations (Moscovici, Neisser and others). In the undertaken research, the above-mentioned classical works are analyzed and the main conclusions about frames and social representations obtained in the framework of recent studies are used (Yanow, van Hulst, Vakhshhtayn, Nemchin).

RESULTS

The basic views of the analysis of human actions are, firstly, the dispositions and individual differences of a person who performs them, and secondly, the specific situations in which these actions are performed. Using the concept of a frame allows exploring another aspect – a frame of social representations or a semantic frame, in the context of which a person determines the situation in which he/she acts.

Goffman defines a frame as the integrity of the practices constituted by agents, as well as the meanings that people attach to their actions and the actions of others (both nonverbal and verbal ones) within the social context, in repetitive, typical social situations (Goffman, 1974). The analysis of the social nature and social conditioning of cognition refers to the works of Schütz, Scheler (Bovina, 2011) and especially Berger and Luckmann (1995), which form new trends in the sociology of knowledge, the theoretical field of sociology, studying the issues of the social nature of knowledge from various theoretical and methodological perspectives. The main provisions of the sociology of knowledge about the binding of individual knowledge to the social process and the relativity of knowledge are the most important methodological prerequisite of this study of frames.

The methods and methodology of the sociology of knowledge, which uses the study of natural interactions to determine the principles of interpreting the phenomena of everyday life, were borrowed from the works of Harre (Urry, 1995), who forms one of two basic branches of modern constructionism together with the works of Gergen (2001). The second branch of constructionism is related to the concept of social representations, which is equally important for this research. The authors focused on it in more detail.

Certainly, the encyclopedic philosophical definition of representation as a reproduced image of an object or a phenomenon that a person does not perceive here and now and which is based on the past experience of a subject (person), does not directly point to the concept of a "frame"; however, a philosophical analysis of representations gives the necessary methodology, which allows a more detailed approach to the analysis of the formation of frames. On the one hand, representations are special ideal formations that are distinguished by their own content, to which something may or may not actually correspond, in comparison, for example, with perceptions and sensations, which are most often correlated by a subject with external reality. On the other hand, representations provide the possibility of thinking, which deals with objects that go beyond sensation and perception, since representations are "copies", traces of past perceptions. In the study of frames, both conclusions are important:

1. Representations exist as special ideal formations with their own content,
2. Representations are "copies", traces of past perceptions.

The study of Neisser (1981) on visual representations is quite interesting. His conclusions have much in common with the analyzed concept of frame: representations are nothing but cognitive maps or cognitive schemes for collecting perceptual information, isolated from the perceptual cycle by the perceiver for using them for other purposes. To analyze a frame, it is important to take into account this feature of representation: a scheme is a plan that directs the collection of information about the real world, so it cannot be viewed as distinct from the object of perception.

At the same time, it contains perceptual anticipation: representations, i.e. cognitive maps, schemes, are mainly the result of empirical experience, but they are also partially pre-experimental, innate. Attention should be paid to the difference between the perceptual scheme (i.e. representation) of a particular person or a past event and the amodal scheme of the world, which is the basis of other perceptual maps.

Thus, the first two conclusions important for the study of frames can be supplemented with three more:

1. Representations are schemes (cognitive maps) of collecting perceptual information;
2. A scheme is a plan that directs the collection of information about the real world, so it cannot be viewed as distinct from the object of perception;
3. Cognitive maps are mainly the result of empirical experience; they are partially innate, i.e. pre-experimental.

These conclusions, which are valid for representations of the world around man, do not reflect the peculiarities of social phenomena and facts. According to Moscovici (1984), the reality of social representations is constructed not at an individual psychological level, but in the process of macro- and micro social interactions. This is due to the fundamental difference between individual and social representations. A social representation is an object that cannot exist independently of social actors, and not a representation of an object that exists independently of social subjects. In other words, social phenomena and facts are an object of social representations.

It is also necessary to mention the collective views that Durkheim (1995) considered the main element of public consciousness. Not the state of individual consciousness, but the conditions of interaction and social life of people are the initial cause of the emergence of collective values, moods, attitudes, and representations. However, Moscovici suggested using the term "social representations" instead of "collective representations". The scientist explained this by the fact that it would allow analyzing the interrelations and interdependence between the individual world and the social world characterized by constant changes; as well as due to the disagreement with a strictly normative structural-functional approach (Parsons (1968)), according to which "social facts" force individuals to comply with the established system of roles, statuses, and standards established in society. According to Moscovici, social representations are created by people and not imposed by society. This is "a set of concepts, beliefs, and explanations that arise in everyday life during interpersonal communications. The authors' approach focuses on how people think and create a shared reality, as well as on the content of their thinking" (Moscovici, 1984).

The work of Abric on the core and periphery of social representation is of interest in the framework of the research undertaken. The central core is distinguished by its sustainability and stability, connected with the history of the group and collective memory, determines the homogeneity of the group through consensus, is not characterized by a high degree of sensitivity to the existing context and intended to shape the meaning, and determines the organization of social representation. The peripheral system is mobile; it is distinguished by its sensitivity to the present context and the presence of contradictions, it ensures the integration of the individual experience of the history of each group member, supports the heterogeneity of the group, is mainly aimed at protecting the central core, adapting a social representation to a specific reality, allows differentiation of its content (Makarov, 2003).

Thus, two more conclusions can be made in the framework of this analysis:

1. The core of social representation is stable, sustainable and connected with the collective memory and history of the group, performs the function of value generation;
2. The periphery of representation is mobile and contradictory, it ensures the integration of individual experience, performs the function of adapting a social representation to a specific reality.

The presence of the core and the periphery of a social representation actually determine its scheme, frame. Thus, Minsky has pointed out that a frame can be formally represented as a two-level structure of nodes and connections between them, where the so-called top nodes contain data that are always valid for a particular situation, and slots that are filled with data from a particular practical situation (Minsky, 1979).

The main provisions of Minsky’s concept of the frame structure formed the basis of most modern studies. Thus, Belyaevskaya speaks about the hierarchical structure of a frame, when the overall meaningful content remains unchanged, and only some aspects change, some of which can come to the fore, while others exist at the background level or in some cases virtually disappear (Belyaevskaya, 1987). Makarov asserts that "a frame consists of a top (theme), i.e. a macro position, and slots, terminals filled with propositions" (Makarov, 2003).

Following the logic of the authors' previous conclusions, the process of frame formation can be presented as a process of generalization, abstraction from particulars – the creation of an ideal (abstract) image of a social object, which cannot be viewed as distinct from the object of perception. Since a frame contains both traces, "copies" of past perceptions and perceptual anticipations, which are partially innate, i.e. pre-experimental, it consists of a central core, which is sustainable, stable, context-sensitive, associated with collective memory and history, and a periphery, which, on the contrary, is mobile, controversial, and sensitive to the present context, protects its central core. For specific studies, it is extremely important to understand that a frame acts as a scheme (cognitive map) for collecting perceptual information and a kind of plan that directs the collection of information about the real world.

The proposed operationalization of the concept allows increasing the effectiveness of applied research due to the fact that the analysis of a social representation expands the scope of study of macro-social processes and, as Wagner rightly pointed out (Wagner, 1998), leads to the emergence of various particular directions of understanding social representations. Fraser (1998) as a prospect for future research indicates the study of how people understand already widespread and accepted social representations.

Thus, a frame is a cognitive formation, a sustainable structure (expectations and knowledge), as well as a scheme of representation or social representations. In this regard, when analyzing the formation of a frame, the conclusions made earlier should be used.
Appearing in a specific situation, a person adopts a frame to a specific situation, fills slots with particulars so that it can be "reviewed", i.e. filled with specific content. Since the periphery of a frame, consisting of slots, is mobile, controversial and sensitive to a specific situation, it allows for differentiation of content, based on the actual individual experience. There is a reverse thinking process from the abstract to the specific, the understanding and assessment of a specific situation, clarification of its meaning.

Moreover, a variety of meanings, depending on the purpose and cultural preparation of an interpreter (a subject) can be drawn from the context, from a specific situation, not just a definition, but an interpretation based on the historical, group or personal experience of a person. According to Goffman, "a frame is an interpretation of cultural and semantic meanings, a way of decoding the situation. On the one hand, this is coordination of some experience, subordinated to the principles of the social organization of events; on the other hand, this is a definition of situations in accordance with the subjective involvement in them" (Goffman, 2004). That is why sociologists suppose that interpretation is based on a special quality of thinking – "sociological imagination". In a sociological study, in order to study specific concepts, it is necessary to attach abstract concepts to real phenomena and observed events, to find points of contact between the conceptual framework and real events, the content of which they reflect.

In specific conditions, a person determines a situation using the semantic frame within which he/she acts. According to Minsky, the mind interprets the perception data in terms that were previously acquired and intended for the description of structures – frames. Thus, a frame is based on a social representation, but the process of interpretation is connected with its use by a subject, an individual, i.e. it is individualized. The importance of this point is that individual interpretation is the assignment of values to sensations (understanding the message, its assessment). Goffman singled out the features inherent in each frame: "When forming a frame, consciousness relies on some ideal type that must exist in society; however, this type is created by man himself due to the culture that dominates in society" (Yadov et al., 2010).

In the process of interpretation, the transformation of sensations into information suitable for storage in memory occurs. The process of interpretation is conjugate and ensures communication and understanding. In other words, individual interpretation can influence behavior more than even objective reality.

As a procedure, the interpretation establishes the content of the concept and values of elements of the objects, the data through the application ("placing", overlaying) on one or another subject area, as well as the result of the specified procedure. In fact, the process of comparison of a real object with its frame occurs: "...definitions of a situation are based on the principles of the organization of events ... and our own subjective involvement in them; I use the term "frame" to refer to these basic elements to be identified" (Goffman, 2004).

The attention of researchers is focused on the process of comparing specific properties and characteristics of objects, determining their differences and similarities and, as a result, determining whether they belong to the same class or to different classes. Each person goes through the identification process independently. Collective meanings in the process of internalization are revealed in relation to significant events, in deeply personal experiences, in the "transformation" of self-identity at the level of personal experiences, and affect the deep-semantic structures – frames. Basically, a person forms internalized, personified social structures or habits, as Bourdieu (1980) called them.

The authors have used the explication of the concept of "habit" to solve the problem of correlating the concepts of "frame" and "identity": if frames are patterns of perception and understanding of social phenomena, the identity means taking positions in frames and correlating oneself with specific symbols, ideals, and values that form behavioral stereotypes – inclinations and abilities to certain actions and practices. Equally important, frames, identities, and symbols are fixed in behavioral stereotypes, according to Skinner’s theory, only if they are emotionally positively reinforced. "A person accepts the meaning that, as he/she feels, organizes his/her inner world and opens up the prospect of life’s trajectory" (Buyakas, 2000).

Basically, a frame defines the so-called "identification code", the study of which is the most important task of the study, since its understanding directly influences social relations, value orientations, political and economic attitudes and models of social behavior. That is why, as Blumer (1969) argued, in order to understand the meaning of the action, one needs to understand how the process of defining a situation works. In other words, the process of framing means transferring a framed social representation, at first, into personified social structures and then into actions. That is why for carrying out applied research a frame analysis of social representations underlying the social actions understudy is necessary.

At that point, the framing process can be defined as a sequence of several steps:

1. The processes of communicative interaction and their consequences basically carry out the construction of social reality in the form of frames (schemes) of general social representations;
2. These schemes (frames) are used in the course of the interpretive process to which a person resorts in his/her social interaction. Appearing in a specific situation, even if the situations are perceived as expected, familiar and ordinary, a person asks about the meaning of the situation, identifying it with the frame. The work of meaning-making – situation framing – makes it possible to leap "from what there is to what should be" (Rein, & Schon, 1977);
3. The answer of a person (first of all, to him/herself and then to others) to the question of meaning is always implicitly, secretly reflected in actions, both individual and collective ones.

The effectiveness of the frame formation for the subject depends on the availability or lack of new possibilities of actions for other actors. One cannot disagree with the statement of Schmidt (2000) that “interpretative politics is a competition for the right to frame ideas”, which switches the attention “from competition for individual preferences to competition for common understanding” (Yanow, & van Hulst, 2011). In addition, not only the availability of several scenarios for the further development of the situation but also a certain degree of freedom in choosing them is significant.

It is also necessary to mention the differences in the experience of having control over the situation and its framing among the actors. Some of them can focus their skills on keeping the boundaries of key definitions and then decide what to do with aspects of the problem that go beyond the frames of the situation. Or, on the contrary, they can reveal differences that will become the basis for transformations of the situation and open up the possibility of changes. The interpretation of the situation proposed by such actors can lead to the formation of new frames of the situation and even to a change in the social representations underlying them. This will be followed by a new process of framing, due to the fact that, on the one hand, this process implies continuous narration of problem situations and, on the other hand, involves the socio-political participation of actors in these situations.

DISCUSSION

A frame is an object of study of various sciences: sociology, psychology, political science, philosophy, computer science, and others. The interpretation of the formation of the frame structure presented in the article contributes to the enrichment of the scientific understanding of this category, the analysis of its various aspects and features. Thus, studies of both the framing process and the structural components of a frame of social representations (the core and periphery) seem promising.

The concept of a frame and social representations considered in the system allows expanding research capabilities of the analysis of the formation and features of a frame of social representations in various social, political, cultural and other situations.

For example, in sociology, a method of frame analysis is in demand mainly for understanding the functioning and development of social institutions, including the mass media. The media very often have a leading role in shaping public opinion and public awareness. The framing technique, which enhances the influence of information on society through mass communication, is increasingly being used. The media not only emphasize a certain aspect of social reality but also popularize its specific interpretation, interpretation of its causes, assessment and possible solutions (Kravchenko, 2008). The main conclusions described in this article allow, on the one hand, clarifying the role of the media in the process of framing and, on the other hand, determining the features of the formation of a frame of social representations and its structure.

CONCLUSION

For the study of people's everyday interactions, frame analysis is one of the most significant theoretical resources. Regardless of whether a person is aware of the internal structure of frames or not, he/she can still use frames. In addition, according to Goffman, a frame is “a certain perspective of perception, creating a formal definition of the situation”.

Despite the variety of interpretations of a frame in different scientific disciplines and theories, they all agree that a frame represents a certain structure in all approaches; it is based on knowledge and expectations of the situation; represents any significance for the subject that appears in it.

A frame is a cognitive formation, a stable structure (expectations and knowledge), as well as a scheme of representation or social representations that can be defined as special ideal formations with their own content, these are "copies", traces of past perceptions, cognitive maps for collecting perceptual information. The structure of a frame of social representations implies the availability of the core and periphery.

The processes of communicative interaction and their consequences basically construct the social reality in the form of frames (schemes) of general social representations. These schemes (frames) are used in the interpretative process to which a person resorts in his/her social interaction. Appearing in a specific situation, even if the situations are perceived as expected, familiar and ordinary, a person asks about the meaning of the situation, identifying it with a frame. The answer of a person (first of all, the answer to him/herself and then to others) to the question of meaning is always implicitly, discreetly reflected in actions, both individual and collective ones.

The main conclusions presented in this article can be used to deepen the theoretical-methodological and practical ideas in the field of analysis of the frame of social identity, its substantive components, and individual aspects, as well as to improve institutional approaches, the regulatory framework, and practices of activities in the framework of the framing process.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study was carried out with the financial support of the Russian Foundation for Basic Research in the framework of scientific project No. 19-011-00479 "Frames of the Formation and Reproduction of Regional Identity".

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