

Statement of research questions

Introduction

There is now a scientific consensus that anthropogenic climate change is an issue that needs to be addressed (Cook et al. 2013). Now, the discussion around climate change has switched to the solutions, the social licence required to be able to implement these solutions (Hall et al. 2015). Social Licence being the ongoing acceptance or approval of a project in by its stake-holders, specifically its community (Boutilier 2014).

This requirement for social licence, and to whom that licence is granted is greatly impacted by the way that climate and the energy transition debate is framed by our politicians and media (Ellen Good 2008). These frames can be utilised by both progressive and conservative actors to impact the energy transition (?).

The origin of framing as a concept for communications is often attributed to R. M. Entman (1993), who defined it as the act of *‘selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communication text’*. Through this action, the frame can then: define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies.

Framing constitutes a powerful set of tools that communicators can utilise to influence public opinion and societal norms (R. Entman, Matthes, and Pellicano 2009). Within this landscape of media influence, conservative framing often becomes the dominant perspective, influenced by corporate advertisers and their substantial financial backing, which generally favours a more cohesive and unified presentation of conservative viewpoints (R. M. Entman 2007). In times of crisis, actors strategically use framing to create narratives that help them retain power and justify existing policies, showcasing its role in maintaining influence and control over public perception (Hart Arjen Boin and McConnell 2009).

In the scope of climate change, these conservative frames have manifested themselves as denialist or contrarian frames, where climate solutions are framed as harmful or ineffectual, while the status quo is portrayed as the best option (Coan et al. 2021). These frames are used to destroy social licence and ultimately delay or stop a pro-climate energy transition from occurring.

One place where these frames have been particularly effective is Australia, where a regression in climate attitudes has taken place. Once seen as a global front-runner in climate policy (?), Australia is now a global leader in climate denialism (?). This shift has been linked to the portrayal of climate change in our media and how multinational organisations have used contrarian frames to build public doubt in climate science and revoke the social licence for solutions (?).

Contrarian framing and misinformation are closely related concepts, yet they possess distinct characteristics. Misinformation involves the dissemination of false or misleading information. In contrast, contrarian framing can present entirely truthful content but emphasizes specific aspects to promote a particular viewpoint. This selective emphasis can shape perceptions without resorting to falsehoods.

Interventions targeting contrarian framing offer certain advantages over those addressing misinformation. Labeling information as “misinformation” can act as a thought-terminating cliché—a phrase that ends discussions and stifles critical thinking. This approach risks halting meaningful debate and may inadvertently suppress valid discourse. By focusing on contrarian framing, interventions can encourage a more nuanced understanding of how information is presented, fostering critical analysis without the contentious implications associated with accusations of misinformation.

Addressing contrarian framing allows interventions to sidestep the complex issue of veracity. Since contrarian framing often involves truthful information presented with selective emphasis, interventions can concentrate on promoting comprehensive understanding and critical evaluation of the information's presentation. This approach avoids the contentious task of adjudicating the truthfulness of claims, thereby reducing the risk of stifling debate or alienating individuals who may be skeptical of authority figures determining veracity.

Addressing the impacts of these frames will require automation in the frame identification process (?). Automated methods are crucial for two primary reasons. First, they enable the processing of vast amounts of data, which is especially important in today's media and information landscape. The sheer volume of data generated daily necessitates efficient processing to extract meaningful insights. Automated data processing systems can handle large datasets rapidly and accurately, reducing the time and resources required compared to manual methods. This efficiency allows organisations to stay competitive and responsive in a fast-paced environment.

Second, in the context of interventions, speed is vital due to the stickiness of frames. Once an issue is framed in a particular way, individuals tend to adhere to that perspective, making it challenging to change their views. Automated methods facilitate swift analysis and response to emerging frames, enabling timely interventions that can counteract or reframe narratives before they become entrenched. This agility is essential for effectively addressing and influencing public discourse.

Research Questions or Hypothesis

How can automated methods be used to detect key discourse shifts, identify areas of debate and consensus, and uncover framing patterns in the Australian energy transition, and how can these methods be applied to create interventions that counteract framing effects while navigating technical challenges and complying with legal constraints?

Subsidiary Questions

What are the key “moments of sway” in the discourse surrounding the energy transition in Australia?

What topics within this discourse are sites of major contention, and which show broad consensus?

How do the key frames re-emerge and change over time in the energy transition discourse?

How can automated methods be designed to create interventions that address and reduce framing effects in the energy transition discourse?

What technical challenges must be overcome in implementing these automated interventions effectively?

What legal constraints (such as copyright, fair use, privacy) must be considered when developing automated interventions for framing effects?

Review of Relevant Research and Theory

Contrarian framing detection is a rather unique task, and has not been attempted by many. However, the methods for it will be drawing from both misinformation detection work, and framing analysis work.

- Overview of the current state of framing analysis
- Overview of a misinformation detection
- Overview of datasets for media analysis.

Procedure

Outline of the linking between the overton window, framing, and contrarianism.

Proposed Project Structure (i.e., Chapter Outline)

- Limitations and accessibility of media analysis work in australia

Timeline for Project Completion / Statement of Progress to Date

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