INFOCORE Definitions

"Agenda for Action"

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Definition: "Agenda for Action"

Agendas for action are prospective discursive constructions that postulate specific goals which must still be achieved (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013). A complete agenda construction consists of three elements: A presentation of the present state or dynamic that cannot justifiably be left to itself; a future state that is desirable and attainable; and a set of more or less specific courses of action suitable to progress from the lamentable or precarious current to the desirable future state (Benford & Snow, 2000). As types of speech acts (Searle, 1979), agendas for action generally contain 'directive' propositions: Their content does not describe an existing state of affairs, but they are attempts to get the world to match the propositional content of the utterance. The way in which the present state or dynamic is constructed as deficient is a necessary part of the agenda: First, the way of its deficiency implicates how exactly the desired future state is different (or inversely, a characterization of a desired future state implicates in which way the present is considered flawed); second, the specific characterization of the present justifies the necessity of action suitable to achieve a desirable state. Contrary to mainstream research into political and media agendas, which mostly focuses on the (prioritization of) issues that must be acted upon, agendas for action thus distinguish between different qualities of ideals and courses of action advocated (Edy & Meirick, 2007). Agendas for action are related to the treatment recommendation dimension of interpretative frames, which also imply specific consequences for desired action. However, the agenda construction is typically more specific about the future construction and the way there, and less dependent on specific problem definitions and causal explanations: The same agendas can follow from different frames' organizing ideas, and within the logic of a frame, multiple agenda constructions can normally be specified.

Agendas for action can be constructed anew, or remind publics of familiar and even widely acknowledged teleological states (prospective memory: reminding others to do something, or remain committed to a goal; Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2013). They can be formulated as explicit calls for action, using the imperative mood or directive verbs/nouns (appeal, call, request, urge, ask, beg, order, instruct, need to), but can also appear as indirect directives, where the call for action is implied within assertive statements (e.g., "every solution that is not supported by both sides is bound to fail"). Calls for action can request specific new ways of acting, the continuation, reinforcement or discontinuation of actions, or even inaction. However, the desired state would not be actualized without this action (or inaction), and the action (or inaction) must be called for as it is not what would happen anyway.[1] Agendas for action can be formulated for dissemination in the media by political actors, NGOs, or other social actors, but they can also be actively constructed by journalists. The latter may be more common in interventionist journalistic cultures (Hanitzsch, 2007).

In INFOCORE, agendas for action are investigated primarily by the content analytic WPs, which look at their articulation, selection, transformation and reception within the news dissemination process. However, agendas for action are also relevant for the interviewing WPs, especially WP2 (political actors) and WP4 (NGOs): they are likely to appear as both a discursive construction in the actors'

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[1] For instance, calls for continuation only make sense if there is talk of abandoning certain practices, calls for termination only make sense if a practice is otherwise expected to continue. This alternative can be a discursive construction, such that there is no actual threat that must be acted upon.

discourse, and an important theme in the context of actors' interaction with the media (particularly in relation to agenda building efforts; Sheafer & Gabay, 2009).

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