

## Media Agenda Setting

by A. Smith (2020)

1. Agenda Setting Theory relates to the media's apparent ability to manipulate public opinion. Freeland (2012) claims the media guides the public agenda, or collective thinking, by giving attention to issues **it** wants to be in the public eye, making suggestions on topics, and subsequently influencing the public's views on the topic. With **its** great influence on the audience, the media instils what it wants the viewers to think rather than allowing people to have their own opinion, thereby creating a grading of news prevalence (Utwente.nl, 2020). Through agenda setting, the media increase, alter and decrease public awareness on important issues.

2. The fundamental aim of agenda setting theory is to create public awareness of the salient issues occurring in the nation (Freeman & Berger, 2011). The theory states that the more frequently and prominently an issue is seen in the media, the more likely it is to have greater impact on the audience. Freeland (2012) highlights that agenda setting has been categorised as three types (as suggested by Dearing and Rogers): media, policy and public agenda setting. Media agenda setting emphasises the impact of the media on the public. Public agenda setting emphasises the agenda of the public. Policy agenda setting explains the influence of the public and media agendas on the opinion of the policymakers. Two assumptions here are significant. The first assumption is that the media and the press do not suggest reality; rather, they suggest a scenario that suits their agenda. The second assumption is more coverage or focus on a specific issue by the media often results in the assumption by the public that those covered issues are far more significant in comparison to other issues. The media affects the way the public receive information; known as 'framing'. **This** concept points out that the media not only guides people on what to think about a specific issue but also how to think about it (Nowak-Teter, 2018).

3. As the media uses agenda setting to control news and information accessed by people, a concept entitled 'gatekeeping' plays a significant part in delivering the news to the masses (Pingree et al., 2013). Welbers et al. (2018) explain that gatekeeping can be defined as the information control process and the control over the selection of content that is presented by the media. If a news story, or piece of information does not suit the media's agenda, they limit **its** visibility to the public. Gatekeeping is a vital tool for the media for setting the agenda.

4. There is one main assumption on which agenda setting theory rests: more coverage of a certain issue by the media leads to the public placing increased importance on that issue (Gauntlett, 2006). However, the surge in social media platforms and internet facilities has allowed people to easily access information from different sources, so it has become harder for the media to set the agenda. Nowak-Teter (2018) states that agenda setting by the media is still prevalent, but hard to measure. **This** is because the link between the changes in the opinion of the public and the influence of the media's coverage is often hard to determine. Another criticism that agenda setting theory often faces that it does not work on an audience who already has a strong opinion on a certain issue. Also, the information shared through the agenda can be misunderstood by the people as they might not view the details and miss some key points (Nowak-Teter, 2018). As a result, there is some uncertainty as to the scale and impact media agenda setting has had in recent years.

5. However, the impact of agenda setting can be seen in multiple contemporary events. For example, coverage of the UK's choice to leave the European Union: dubbed Brexit. The UK public registered **their** vote in a referendum on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 to decide whether the country would remain part of the EU (Ft, 2016). The decision to leave the EU, known was decided in a closely contested vote. Three key issues were highlighted during the BREXIT campaign: sovereignty, economy and immigration. Sogelola (2018) illustrates that during the last two months before Brexit, different polls had been carried out

and fluctuations regarding which of the three key issues was the most important issue could be observed. This fluctuation was created by media agenda setting. Media exposure played a big role, as it influenced the priorities of the public through its coverage of BREXIT. Shifting the focus away from key issues, such as the future of the NHS, onto issues such as immigration, which the media knew was an emotive topic to the British public. Consequently, it can be concluded that agenda setting by the media plays a significant role in influencing public opinion. The national media needs to ensure that the agenda created through the news is beneficial for the masses and **its** own interests must not come within that agenda.

## References

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