

Agenda setting theory

Science



Introduction

Agenda setting theory is first developed by Professor Maxwell McCombs and Professor Donald Shaw in their Chapel Hill study in 1968. The agenda setting theory is separate into three parts which is media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda. Agenda setting theory is defined as the power of news media whereby mass media set an agenda which will influences the public which is called as public agenda by highlighting the issue frequently in media.

Therefore the main effect of media in agenda setting is telling people not what to think, but what to think of.

The policy agenda is the issues that policy makers consider important after the public start to make campaign or petition to show protest against the organizations. MassCommunication plays an important role in our society its purpose is to inform the public about current and past events. Mass communication is defined in “ Mass Media, MassCulture” as the process whereby professional communicators use technological devices to share messages over great distances to influence large audiences.

Within this process the media, which can be a newspaper, a book and television, takes control of the information we see or hear. The media then uses gate keeping and agenda setting to “ control our access to news, information, and entertainment” (Wilson 14). Gate keeping is a series of checkpoints that the news has to go through before it gets to the public. Through this process many people have to decide whether or not the news is to be seen or heard. Some gatekeepers might include reporters, writers, and editors. After gate keeping comes agenda setting.

Elaboration of the Theory

The Agenda-Setting Theory says the media (mainly the news media) aren't always successful at telling us what to think, but they are quite successful at telling us what to think about. The power of news media is to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. For example, newspapers provide a host of cues about the salience of the topics in daily news. They will lead story on first page, large headlines and etc. Besides that, television also consider as a mass communication tool.

Television offers numerous cues about salience too. Their opening story is on newscast, length of time devoted to the story and etc. As said by Walter Lippmann, Agenda-Setting Theory is " the world outside & the pictures in our heads". The news media are a primary source of those pictures in our heads about the larger world of public affairs, a world that for most citizens is " out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. " Agenda setting is divided into two levels where the first level stress on common subject that media thinks the subject is important.

The second level decides which part of the subject is important. Both level leads to the concept of agenda setting where the concept is divided into three parts. The first part of the process is the importance of the issues that are going to be discussed in the media. Second, the issues discussed in the media have an impact over the way the public thinks, this is referred as public agenda. Ultimately the public agenda influences the policy agenda. Furthermore, the media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda.

People would attend only to news and views that didn't threaten their established beliefs. Agenda-setting will reconfirms the power of the press while still maintaining that individuals were free to choose. The agenda-setting function is a 3 part-process. Firstly, media agenda is the issues discussed in the media. Secondly, public agenda means issues discussed and personally relevant to public. Lastly, policy agenda is the issues that policy makers consider important. Media agenda and public agenda are close to each other. Media agenda is the set of issue addressed by media sources.

It is a composite index of media prominence revealed the importance of foreign policy, law and order, fiscal policy, public welfare and civil rights. While public agenda are issues the public consider important. It is the rank of the five issues was identical to the media agenda. The key concept and terms are agenda setting, salience transfer, gatekeeping, framing, priming and determinants of agenda-setting effects. Agenda setting is giving priorities to alternative policy issues but in the early communications studies, shown a mixture about the ability to influence public opinion on the given issue.

Salience transfer refers to the capacity of the media to influence the relative importance individuals attached to the policy. Next is gate keeping is a process that control the media content. Framing is the importance and interpretation of people attach to potential items on the public agenda are strongly influenced by how the media present news stories. Priming happen when framing centers on political loading of the presentation of news, it can be conscious and not conscious. Priming basically mean draw attention to

certain issue even in a neutral manner. Last but not least is the determinant of agenda-setting effects.

Media credibility or also known as media reliance are found that the determinant is weaker than the media exposure and media exposure are more important than media credibility in relation to presidential state of the union addresses. Application of the Theory In Malaysia, one of the case studies was to examine the Malay language newspaper's media agenda during the general election. (Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, UPM) The study was conducted to examine the use of the Barisan Nasional (BN) manifesto as the media agenda during the general election for the year 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995 and 1999.

A model for the study was constructed based on the Agenda Setting Theory. A content analysis was conducted on 50 issues of Utusan Malaysia (UM) and Berita Harian (BH). Throughout the studies, it was found that there were 11 major themes frequently used in the BN manifesto namely: politics, foreign policy, development, economy, social education, security, religion, workers welfare, agriculture and the quality of life. Above were the main themes in the news during the general election for the year of study.

The content analysis also found that there were 4461 news with the BN manifesto shown in 11 major news themes with " politics" in the lead and the " quality of life" ending the list. It also showed that the BN manifesto was mainly covered in various sections such as the Local News, Foreign News, Special Column, Main Column, Editorial, Advertisement, Economy, Asean, Forum, Articles and others. While the coverage on News, Articles,

Photographs, Editorial, Letter to the Editor, Cartoon, Columnist and Comments also showed the present of BN manifesto.

There was also a small difference between the two newspapers in terms of its news coverage on the BN manifesto during the general election. The study clearly showed that the media agenda of the two mainstream newspapers in the country was framed by the content of the BN manifesto during the duration of the general election for the year 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995 and 1999 and thus, strengthening the Agenda Setting Theory. The media institution and politic institution are closely linked to each other and are hardly being separated. Both the institutions are interdependent on each other.

In Malaysia, we are practicing the democracy system, thus, media are an important instrument to achieve the democracy level; Media play a role in influencing the public in deciding their votes during a general election, either to vote for the specific individual or the party. Besides, media also take control in the politic process as mentioned earlier in the Agenda Setting Theory. In a democratic country like Malaysia, the process in politics often involve media as a tool to spread the news on certain parties' issues and frame some of the suggestions or views on certain parties or individuals.

In order to achieve a country that is practicing democratic system, the general elections were often used as a measurement tool in testing the level of support among the voters toward a specific party. Personal experience & interpersonal communication among elites and other individuals So, the process of general election in Malaysia is a very crucial component in a democratic way. There were 12 general elections being held so far in <https://assignbuster.com/agenda-setting-theory-process-essay-samples/>

Malaysia which were in the year 1959, 1964, 1969, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1986, 1990, 1995, 1999 and 2004.

Also, there were 6 Prime Ministers that have involved themselves in became the main politic communicators in every general election that have been done. Every Prime Minister has their own plans in collaboration with the media to enhance their communication through media, and utilized it in a proper ways. Gatekeepers' influential media & spectacular news & events

Policy Agenda Public Agenda Media Agenda Real world indications of the importance of an agenda, issue or event

Figure 1: Three Main Components in Agenda Setting Process

In political communication, media is one of the aspects to be deal with. Others include media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda. All these three main components form a process (Agenda Setting Process) by which a complete political communication is carried out where the media were used to disseminate the messages or information to mass audiences. This process is involved in the Agenda Setting Process and has TWO levels: The media agenda affects the public agenda, and the public agenda affects the policy agenda.

The communication using media has done by the politicians to publish their views and news or in this case, the manifesto of Barisan Nasional in Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian in the media agenda. However, there are existence of gatekeepers that may influence the news and events to be published. In the case studies on BN manifesto, the gatekeepers here would be the editor and the owner of Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian newspapers publishers.

The purposes of having gatekeepers here is to avoid harmful, negative, sensitive or religious issues being discussed which may cause misunderstanding within the nation. According to the research, Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian used media agenda to influence the public, and this has brought the issue to a broader step which is the public agenda, where the public start discussing about the issue. In the case studies, there are some similarities in the manifesto of Barisan Nasional.

During the general election, extensive media coverage on the political issues of BN were published continuously especially in the front page of the newspapers being analyzed: Utusan Malaysia and Berita Harian. Those issues are similar to the manifesto of BN. Therefore, the public can gain most of the information about BN from the newspaper than the other party. After the public has start discussing about the issue, which is the involvement of BN's manifesto in both the newspapers being mentioned, there were some activists who tried to support or banned the manifesto.

The real world indicator will decide the importance of the agenda itself. Then, through the personal experiences and interpersonal communications among the elites and other individuals, there might be changes in the policy agenda. Finally, the policy agenda causes the media agenda to publish about the news and information all over again. The Agenda Setting Process will be repeated. Strengths and Weakness of the Theory We found that agenda setting theory has three strengths. First, agenda setting theory has explanatory power.

Because this theory explains why most of the people prioritize the same issues as important. Therefore, most of the people will discuss the same

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issues at the same time. They will also concentrate discuss the issues because they think that the issues are affecting them. Second, this theory also has predictive power as it predicts that if people are exposed to the same media, they will feel the same issues as important. For example, if one issue be the headline of all the newspapers for one week, people will feel that this issue is very important and it will affect their life.

Furthermore, this theory has organizing power because it helps organize existing knowledge of media effects. There are also weaknesses, such as media users may not be as ideal as the theory assumes. People may not be well-informed, deeply engaged in public affairs, thoughtful and skeptical. Media just tell them what to think about the issues. People just know the appearance of the issues and not deeply engage in the issues. They will also think that are the issues reported correct or the media have hide something bad that they do not know about the issues.

So, some of the people do not trust what the media have said. Instead, people may pay only casual and intermittent attention to public affairs and remain ignorant of the details. For people who have made up their minds, the effect is weakened. News media cannot create or conceal problems; they may only alter the awareness, priorities and salience people attached to a set of problems. Research has largely been inconclusive in establishing a casual relationship between public salience and media coverage.

Suggestions to Improve on the Theory

For communication theory to be adopted by researchers and remain viable, it must be able to survive and grow through its ability to adapt to changing environments, encourage further research, and serve as a foundation for <https://assignbuster.com/agenda-setting-theory-process-essay-samples/>

studies beyond those in which the founders originally applied their theory. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972) the result of their study shows that fewer voters knew about specific issues. While they found out that media were often effective in raising awareness of issues with undecided voters.

They also found that issues presented by media that were new to audiences were better received by the public than issues with which the public was already familiar. The key factor to the ability of media to have an agenda-setting effect upon their audiences depends on the desire of the viewers to become informed about the issues. For example, when the voters want to know more about their ideal government leaders the public have to search for more information about the leaders and the party as the desired for them to become informed on the issues instills a strong motivation factors for the public's.

Although the theory may seem to be acceptable but the theory still have its own weaknesses and failure which are visible and need to be improved. For example, while the article concentrate on the presentation of the issues during the election campaigns, the willingness of voters to listen to issues presented by the media, they fail to examine the degree to which mass media is able to raise issues and attract information-seeking audiences on its own but they fail to examine the degree of how the mass media is able to heightened public interest of political issues during election seasons to perform an agenda-setting function.

Besides that, the media agenda in agenda-setting theory have their own limitations, as media may not be as ideal as the theory assumes. The information from the media may not deliver appropriately, deeply engaged

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in public affairs, thoughtful and skeptical. Therefore to improve the theory effectiveness of the theory, the media should increase the understanding of the issues by reporting a more detail information about the election with wide range of information.

In addition, the media can also carry out a survey to understand better the level of absorption information of the readers, listeners and viewers. The media should also aware of the public acceptance and understanding of the issues as the agenda-setting theory has its own limitations in dispersing the news. Conclusion In conclusion, the Agenda Setting Theory is a very important practice in media industry especially in a democratic country like Malaysia. The media collaborate with government to control what to be think and discussed among the public.

The purpose is to shape their perception over certain issues. It can be from a political issue to welfare issue. This theory proved that whatever issue has been discussed shape the importance of that specific issue and bring to the discussion in the public as in the public agenda. If the public or majorities think that there are some dissatisfactions or objections going on, there will be changes in the policy agenda. Thus, agenda setting is a very important tool in media even though there are still some weaknesses in this practice.

So, the media should take in to account to improve their practice by injecting more information not only to a specific area but make it more widely than today in order for the public to have more knowledge about our nation and this may create a morecritical thinkingnation.

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