21st Century Communication:
A Reference Handbook

Agenda Setting and Framing

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Chapter 57: Agenda Setting and Framing

Among the theories of communication in the 21st century, agenda setting, which has its roots in the early 20th century, has proven to be one of the more robust theories, if not the most robust theory, in communication. The resilience of this theory is a result of its parsimonious, yet expansive, qualities, its roots, and its connection to other theories in communication. According to Blumler and Kavanagh (1999), "among the field's master paradigms, agenda setting may be most worth pursuing" (p. 225). The pursuit of agenda setting has seduced many researchers into studying various aspects of the theory, resulting in hundreds of published works. This prolific work on agenda setting has continued to tweak the theory, making it as strong, if not stronger, than its origins.

Even though researchers have been very innovative in their agenda-setting research, the premise of the theory remains very simple. Bearing in mind that media are the main source of information for the public, the main idea behind agenda setting is that the issues that media deem salient will influence what the public in turn deems salient. This transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda is what is known in communication theory as agenda setting. In other words, media tell us what to think about. In addition to its simplicity, agenda setting shifted the focus of researchers from attitudinal to cognitive media effects, thus weakening, if not dismissing, Klapper's (1960) thesis of the minimal consequences of media. Even though the initial focus of agenda-setting effects dealt with cognitive effects, evidence (as seen later in this chapter) points to possible consequences of agenda setting on attitudes and opinions as well as behaviors.

The robustness of agenda setting is due not only to its simplicity and to the proliferation of research but also to its roots, which run deep to earlier conceptualizations of public opinion. Walter Lippmann, in his book *Public Opinion*, published in the early 20th century, discusses the role of media as mediators between reality and the public. Lippmann (1922) argues that public opinion is a reaction to what we see in media content, which is not necessarily a reflection of reality. The importance of media is in

their creation of this new realityor environment, resultingina "pseudo-environment" to which people react. Cohen (1963) suggested that the press tell its readers what to think about. McCombs and Shaw (1972) are the ones who coined the term *agenda setting* in their empirical examination of a U.S. presidential campaign. They surveyed undecided voters and asked them **[p. 517 ↓]** to indicate the issues they deemed important. McCombs and Shaw also content analyzed nine news sources. They then compared media's agenda with the public's agenda and found evidence that media agenda and the public agenda correlate and that indeed media tell the public what to think about. Further studies continued to focus on the transfer of issue salience from media to the public and established the causal direction between the two agendas.

The hundreds of research projects that ensued tested the underlying hypothesis of agenda setting in different circumstances such as with a variety of media, countries, research designs, topics, and agendas, as well as under different conditions. The influence of media agenda on the public agenda has been supported over and over again.

Agenda setting has links to several theories in communication. Connections have been established between agenda setting and cultivation theory among researchers who focus on the entertainment media. Others have examined the relationship between agenda setting and the two-step flow of communication. The link between agenda setting, priming, and framing is proving to be the most fruitful and at times the most controversial development of agenda-setting research.

Attribute agenda setting is the latest leap in agenda-setting theory, and it is through this second level of agenda setting that priming and framing come into play. The second level of agenda setting goes beyond the original premise of agenda setting in terms of the transfer of issue salience from media to the public to the influence of issue attributes on evaluation by the audience. Priming deals with the salience of attributes in the public's judgments of public officials and candidates for public office, whereas framing deals with the salience of attributes in the public's judgments of issues. Thus, media not only tell us what to think about, as established by the first level of agenda setting, but media also tell us how to think. The controversy lies in whether framing and priming are extensions of agenda setting or whether they are very different phenomena. Takeshita (2006) has concerns that the link between agenda setting and framing could lead to

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the theory's decline, whereas others see this link as evidence of the theory's strength. According to Ghanem (1997), "this shift in emphasis does not negate the basic agenda-setting hypothesis, but rather builds on what already exists. It is one highway linking up with another major thoroughfare" (pp. 4–5).

Agenda setting has thus become a two-level theory, with one level dealing with objects and the second level dealing with that object's characteristics and traits. It is interesting to note that the second level of agenda setting is also leading to a flood of research in many countries on different topics using a variety of methodologies just like the first level did and continues to do.

Volumes can be written on the various aspects of agenda setting, slicing it and categorizing it in many different ways. This chapter focuses on several aspects of agenda setting that seem particularly relevant at this point in time based on the direction of the research and the controversy that has ensued as a result of some of that research. The areas of focus are the reemergence of an interest in contingent conditions, attribute agenda setting, and the second level of agenda setting as well as its relationship to framing. This chapter also examines the consequences of agenda setting that evidence indicates go beyond cognitive effects. In addition, this chapter will suggest other areas of possible agenda-setting research in the ever-changing media landscape.

Contingent Conditions

Researchers studying agenda setting have specified several conditions under which agenda-setting effects are more or less likely to occur. Research in this area has focused on the stimuli as well as audience characteristics that influence the agenda-setting process. Benton and Frazier (1976) examined the transfer of salience for issues as well as subissues. They divided several issues into three levels. Using the economy as an example, the first level would be the general category of the economy, the second level would include problems and solutions, and the third level would include pro and con positions. Their studies revealed that newspapers, but not television, produced agenda-setting effects at all three levels. Of course, in many instances the influences of newspapers and television are equal, but when there is a difference, newspapers

are likely to be more influential as agenda setters. Others have examined the optimal amount of time needed for agenda-setting effects to take place. Depending on the issue, the time frame has varied from 1 week to 6 months.

The obtrusiveness of the issue, or the level of personal contact with the issue, also seemed to influence the transfer of salience from media to the public. The more unobtrusive the issue, the more likely it was for agenda-setting effects to take place. On the other hand, personal experience with an issue tends to dilute or diminish the role of media. Inflation would be an example of an obtrusive issue if it reaches the point where it affects our daily purchases. Foreign policy for many of us is an unobtrusive issue because of the lack of personal experience with the issue. Lee (2004) attempts to reconcile the obtrusiveness of an issue hypothesis with that of the cognitive priming hypothesis, which posits that personal experience enhances, rather than lessens, agenda-setting effects. He concludes that obtrusive issues tend to show agenda-setting effects within a shorter time frame than do unobtrusive issues. Closely related to issue obtrusiveness is the geographic proximity of the issue. Palmgreen and Clarke (1977) found that agenda-setting effects are stronger for national issues, which are usually less obtrusive than local issues.

Studies on the role of interpersonal communication on agenda setting provide mixed results, with some studies suggesting that interpersonal communication enhances **[p. 518 ↓]** agenda setting and others reporting the opposite effect. McLeod, Becker, and Byrnes (1974) examined the role of interpersonal communication and found that it played a greater role in agenda setting when newspapers declined as an information source late in the campaign. Shaw (1976) found that interpersonal factors were good predictors of agenda setting. Studies by Erbring, Goldenberg, and Miller (1980) also found that interpersonal communication enhanced the agenda-setting effect. Other researchers found that interpersonal communication diminishes the agenda-setting effect. To add to the contradictory results, still others found that interpersonal communication enhances agenda-setting effects under certain conditions and reduces it under others. Jones, Denham, and Springston (2006) examined the role of interpersonal sources and health issues and found that interpersonal source of information had more of an influence on younger women, whereas older women were more influenced by exposure to media. Other studies just produced inconclusive results on this matter.

Several researchers continued to examine the conditions under which agenda setting takes effect by focusing on the individual and by examining the effects of demographic and psychological variables on agenda setting. Respondents who are interested in an issue and who have a positive attitude toward media are more likely to be susceptible to agenda-setting effects, whereas party affiliation and political philosophy had limited effects. In the same research venue, Tsfati (2003) found that on the aggregate level, the correlation of the media and the public agendas was weaker for skeptics, those who mistrust the news media, than for nonskeptics. These results held true for both print and television. Examining media reliance and not attitude toward media, Yang and Stone (2003) concluded in their study that the more media reliant the public is, the more it will adopt the media agenda.

Perhaps the most complicated yet fruitful contingent condition is the need for orientation because it provides a psychological explanation for the agenda-setting process. It also provides an understanding of why some people are susceptible to agenda-setting effects while others are not. Weaver (1980) breaks down the need for orientation into two dimensions: relevance of the issue and uncertainty regarding the issue. Relevance and uncertainty occur sequentially, with relevance as the initial defining condition of the need for orientation. An issue is relevant if it has any personal or societal relevance. Uncertainty has to do with the amount of information desired on the topic. If an individual has all the information needed on the topic, the uncertainty level is low, and vice versa. A high need for orientation will include high relevance and high uncertainty. When people have a high need for orientation, they will be more likely to experience agenda-setting effects.

Matthes (2006) revisits the need for orientation, which he considers the most prominent contingent condition for agenda setting. He develops a three-dimensional scale of need for orientation to account for the motivational factors involved in media exposure: orientation toward issues, orientation toward facts, and orientation toward journalistic evaluations. The three orientations tie in with the first and second levels of agenda setting, where the first level of agenda setting deals with the overall issue and the second level deals with the cognitive and affective attributes of that issue. The need for orientation toward issues can explain the first level of agenda setting, while the orientation toward facts can explain the cognitive dimension of the second level of

agenda setting and the orientation toward journalist evaluations could help explain the affective dimension of the second level.

Attribute Agenda Setting

Most of the research on agenda setting has investigated the salience of public issues, but sometimes other objects, such as political candidates, have been the focus of investigation. Here the term *object* is used in the same way that social psychologists use the phrase *attitude object* to designate the thing that an individual has an attitude or opinion about. At the level of attention, which is the original arena for agenda-setting effects, the media agenda and the public agenda are defined in the abstract by some set of objects. In turn, these objects have attributes, a variety of characteristics and traits that describe them. When journalists talk about an object and when members of the public talk and think about an object, some of these attributes are emphasized and others are mentioned less frequently. For each object on an agenda, there is an agenda of attributes that influences our perception and understanding of the object.

These attributes have two dimensions, a cognitive component encoding information about specific substantive traits or characteristics that describe the object and an affective component encoding the positive, negative, or neutral tone of the descriptions of these traits when they appear on the news agenda or the public agenda. For example, a news story about a substantive attribute, the leadership ability of a candidate, might quote a supporter referring to this attribute of the candidate in a positive tone and his opponent referring to this attribute in a negative tone.

When the object on the agenda is a public figure, there is significant evidence that the images of these persons in the public mind parallel the media's attribute agenda.

Both traditional agenda-setting effects and attribute agenda-setting effects involve the transfer of salience. The core proposition for these two stages, sometimes referred to as the first and second levels of agenda setting, is that elements prominent on the media agenda become prominent over time on the public agenda. To paraphrase and extend Bernard Cohen (1963), media not only may be successful in telling us what to think about, they also may be successful in telling us how to think about it.

Attribute Agenda Setting and Framing

In its evolution over the past 40 years, agenda-setting theory has converged with a variety of other communication concepts and theories, and attribute agenda-setting links theory with framing. Although there are many widely divergent perspectives on framing, Robert Entman's (1993) frequently cited definition contains language that is complementary to agenda-setting theory in its use of the term *salient*:

> To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (p. 52)

Both framing and attribute agenda setting call attention to the perspectives of communicators and their audiences, how they picture topics in the news, and, in particular, to the special status that certain attributes or frames have in the content of a message. Nevertheless, detailed comparisons of framing and attribute agenda setting are complicated by the plethora of definitions for framing.

In an overview, Gamson (2001) identifies three research domains of the framing approach: (1) the origins and use of frames in the construction of messages, (2) the examination of specific frames in messages, and (3) the interaction of audiences and these messages. In communication research, both agenda setting and framing encompass the specific content of media messages and the effects of this content on audiences. And, as we shall see, the two approaches at times can be virtually indistinguishable in addressing questions about media content and the effects of media content. Nevertheless, the framing and agenda-setting approaches largely diverge in regard to the origins and use of frames in media messages, with considerably more emphasis on this domain in framing research. Here, we will focus on the content of messages and the effects of these messages on the audience, the domains encompassed by both approaches.

Over the long history of media message analysis, scholars have used many levels of abstraction, and three major approaches can be distinguished in both agenda-setting and framing research. One approach is a tight focus on a specific frame or attribute in media messages, such as Iyengar's (1991) distinction between episodic and thematic frames. Even more specific are Kahneman and Tversky's (1984) experiments on the consequences of whether information is presented rhetorically in terms of losses or gains. Nevertheless, many researchers favor a second approach widely employed in quantitative content analysis, in which message content is measured and described in broader, more comprehensive terms of what is selected, emphasized, and excluded. Framing research also frequently considers the central emphasis in messages (Barnett, 2005), and most of the frequently cited definitions of framing refer specifically to emphasis, selection, and exclusion. Gamson (1985) defines *framing* as the emphasis of certain features and the denying of others. Gitlin (1980) defines *frames* as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters" (p. 6). Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, and Ghanem's (1991) definition is similar: "A frame is a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration" (p. 5). In addition to emphasis, Entman's (1993) definition also specifies consequences, the promotion of "*a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described" (p. 52, italics in original).

In agenda-setting research, Ghanem (1996) introduced the concept of the compelling argument, the idea that certain attributes of an object function as compelling arguments for their salience. Compelling arguments are certain ways of organizing and structuring the picture of an object that enjoy high success among the public, an approach that considers the emphasis in media messages from the perspective of the audience. Ghanem examined a situation in Texas during the early 1990s, when intensive crime coverage in the news generated very high levels of public concern about crime as the most important problem facing the country. Nevertheless, during this same period of time, actual crime rates in Texas were declining and had been for several years. Ghanem's examination of the various ways in which crime was framed in the news revealed that the salience of crime on the public agenda was related especially to the frequency of news stories about crime in which the average person

would feel personally threatened. This attribute of crime, this frame in the crime coverage, explained the salience of crime as a public issue even better than the total coverage of crime during this time did. This aspect of the coverage was a compelling argument among Texans for the salience of crime. More recently, Sheafer (2007) has demonstrated the impact of negative coverage of the economy as a compelling argument among voters across five Israeli elections for the Knesset between 1988 and 2003.

Both framing and agenda setting deal with cognitive effects. Agenda setting has long been touted as one of the theories that shifted the focus from attitudes to cognition. Framing is also seen as a cognitive effect associated with the construction of reality and how people think about important public issues. As with media messages, researchers examine these effects from many different perspectives. Kahneman and Tversky (1984) demonstrate that the alteration of messages, shifts in the rhetorical framing of messages, will affect which options will be selected by the public. Iyengar (1991) found that differences **[p. 520 ↓]** in episodic and thematic framing influence the attribution of responsibility by the audience, with episodic frames leading to the attribution of responsibility to the individual and thematic frames leading to the attribution of responsibility to systematic causes.

Agenda-setting research has moved beyond the salience or perceived prominence of objects and their attributes to investigate the consequences of these effects. At the first level of agenda setting, this includes the priming of attitudes as well as the formation of attitudes and opinions. At the second level of agenda setting, there is evidence of attribute priming, the influence of both substantive attributes and their affective tone on attitudes and opinions.

There is an opportunity here to systematically explicate media effects, particularly regarding *how to think* about public affairs if framing and attribute agenda setting are considered as convergent or at least complementary approaches to the study of media effects. If we more carefully conceptualize and measure *how to think, what we know, how we interpret*, and *what we understand*, we can significantly advance our understanding of media effects.

Underlying Psychological Processes

Theoretical efforts to distinguish between framing and attribute agenda setting in terms of the underlying psychological processes have found mixed success, both in terms of empirical fit and in stimulating new empirical investigations. Price and Tewksbury (1997) and Scheufele (2000) focused on two aspects of knowledge activation, the concepts of accessibility and applicability (Higgins, 1996), arguing that framing is grounded in applicability, whereas agenda setting is grounded in accessibility.

Nevertheless, there is empirical evidence from the earliest years of agenda-setting research that the salience of issues on the public agenda is considerably more than the accessibility of those issues as a consequence of the frequency with which issues are portrayed in the news. When an individual is asked to name "the most important issue facing the country today," the perceived salience of an issue presented through media content is significantly moderated by that individual's state of mind, in particular his or her level of need for orientation. Weaver (1977) found that during the 1972 U.S. presidential election, the strength of agenda-setting effects among North Carolina voters increased monotonically with their level of need for orientation. Takeshita (1993) found a similar pattern in a Japanese local election. The strength of an individual's need for orientation is a combined function of the perceived relevance of the topic and the individual's uncertainty about the topic. Specifically in terms of the knowledge activation model, Todorov (2000) refers to applicability as the relevance of the knowledge context and noted that "the size of accessibility effects is a function of the applicability of knowledge activated by the initial questions" (p. 430) and that "applicability constrains accessibility effects—a highly accessible concept may not be applied when it doesn't share any relevant features with the stimulus" (p. 431).

One of the few attempts to empirically distinguish accessibility and perceived importance is Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley's (1997) experiment comparing the effects of TV news stories that presented two different attributes of a highly publicized KKK rally, free speech versus public order. Significant effects were found for the perceived importance of the attribute emphasized in each of the news reports. No effects were found for the accessibility of these attributes. Nelson and colleagues concluded thus:

> Our results contribute to the growing body of evidence questioning mere accessibility models of political judgment and opinion…. Our results point to a more deliberative integration process, whereby participants consider the importance and relevance of each accessible idea. (p. 578)

Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan's (2002) study of an urban development issue focused specifically on the accessibility of issue attributes. The salience of the issue attributes emphasized in the local newspaper was measured (inversely) on the public agenda by the proportions of survey respondents who indicated "Don't know" or "Neutral" in response to issue attribute questions that asked how likely it was for each attribute to happen as a consequence of this proposed development. "In this operationalization, salience of issue attributes refers to their cognitive accessibility or the 'ease in which instances of associations could be brought to mind'" (p. 15). Although the accessibility of the issue attributes increased sharply with greater exposure to the newspaper, the resulting attribute agendas among the public bore little resemblance to the attribute agenda presented in the news coverage. Unlike previous attribute agenda-setting studies grounded in a variety of open-ended and closed-ended measures of the *perceived importance* of attributes that found substantial correlations between the attribute agendas of media and the public, in Ithaca, the pattern of salience among the public measured in terms of cognitive *accessibility* did not replicate these attribute agenda-setting effects. What emerged was a different version of media effects in which the *relative* amount of increased salience for the six attributes among newspaper readers when compared with persons unaware of the issue paralleled media agenda in two of three comparisons.

Consequences of Agenda-Setting Effects for Attitudes, Opinions, and Behavior

Agenda Setting of Issues and Attitudes

When we talk about media effects, we often mean certain influences media messages exert on the audience. There **[p. 521 ↓]** is no widespread agreement on what the

concept of influence means. In mass communication, the division between two types of media effects is accepted—media-induced change in the public's priorities and direct persuasion. Traditionally, attitudes and opinions were treated as similar concepts in assessing media influence, especially when opinions represented evaluative judgments about particular issues or events.

Mass communication scholars used a socio-psychological approach in explaining media effects through the 1950s and 1960s. The core concept of the socio-psychological approach was attitude change, and persuasion was considered to be the main tool of such change. Nevertheless, attitude change studies showed little or no effects through persuasion. Agenda-setting studies restored confidence in the idea that media have quite significant effects. Persuasive effects of media messages were understood as specific cases of a broader media function—to inform the audiences about the events.

Nevertheless, establishing the fact that media structure the opinion of the audience does not answer the question about whether or not media change the attitudes, and if so, how. Some findings suggest that the increased salience of media issues leads to stronger opinions and makes the attitudes more extreme. There was evidence that increasing salience helps form opinions and attitudes. An enhanced coverage of certain issues by media brings about variously framed information that leads to new or modified knowledge and subsequent opinion formation. Researchers also agreed that the psychological priming mechanism underlying the agenda-setting function might be accountable for attitudinal effects. Some authors consider priming as having more long-term effects: "The greater the cumulative exposure to relevant stimuli, the greater the likelihood that 'mere mention' of relevant stimuli triggered priming of applicable attitudes, regardless of the amount of recent coverage in the news" (Althaus & Kim, 2006, p. 973).

Nevertheless, these results do not elucidate the question whether the dominance of the media agenda over public opinion leads to the persuasive effects. In other words, the time has come to explore the link between issue salience and attitude change. Ideally, parallel and simultaneous testing of agenda-setting and attitudinal consequences in experimental studies could determine whether such a link exists. This task is difficult to accomplish without further elaborating particular variables inside media messages and determining the specific psychological processes that mediate transformations

of public opinions. Leff, Protess, and Brook (1986) tried to test agenda-setting and attitudinal effects in a study with a quasi-experimental design; they found some limited indications of attitude change. The results were far from being conclusive due to methodological and theoretical limitations. The authors suggested that "the stylistic form of an investigative report … may affect profoundly its degree of impact" (p. 313) and considered further exploration of a link between a message form, the nature of an issue, and relevant opinions.

Agenda Setting of Attributes and Attitudes

As agenda-setting research progressed to the attribute level stage, a new opportunity to reevaluate the relationships between agenda setting and attitudes appeared. Different classes of media messages were proposed, which identified finer distinctive elements inside broader categories, namely, substantive and affective attributes or frames of an issue. Unlike content frames, the numbers of which are constantly increasing and changing, these attributes capture the characteristics that apply to any media messages. Affective attributes, as an example, color the tone of issue coverage, which not only may raise the importance of the issue but may also help form a certain attitude in audience members or change an existing one. The evaluative character of affective attributes places them at a commensurate level of analysis with attitudes, evaluative in their nature. The impact of a negative or positive tone on the people's assessment of the state of economy has been recently documented. Both experimental and nonexperimental studies confirm the role of affective attributes in shaping the attitudes and opinions of people.

Empirical evidence exists that not only the tone of textual messages but also television news images depicting the behavior of political candidates negatively or positively shape the corresponding attitudes of respondents to these candidates. The studies in the framing tradition brought converging results. These studies employed the concept of valence framing, which is similar to affective attributes. Such frames evaluate issues or situations in either positive or negative terms. Using frames with either negative or positive connotations, the authors found that "valenced frames and risk framing in particular are shown to affect individuals' perceptions, evaluations, and behaviour" (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006, p. 22). Substantive attributes did not become

the focus of attitude studies partly because of their matter-of-fact nature, which does not transform directly into the evaluative nature of opinions and attitudes. The substantive attributes may activate certain cognitive structures, which can trigger corresponding evaluative mechanisms. Although a comparative study of substantive and affective attributes did not measure the attitudes related to these attributes, it indirectly pointed at possible preferences the subjects might reveal in interpretation of corresponding issues. Brewer (2002) found that subjects explained their issue opinions either through "equality" or "morality" frames used in their particular treatments. More direct studies of a link between substantive attributes and attitudes can be compounded by a particular attitude to a specific issue or an event depicted in a **[p. 522 ↓]** media message, not to a more general substantive attribute applicable across particular topics.

Agenda Setting, Attitudes, and Mediating Psychological Mechanisms

Attribute manipulation tied with attitudes toward and opinions about media messages might require an examination of mediating psychological processes in the relationship between agenda setting and attitudes. It is widely accepted that priming is the mechanism that underlies the agenda-setting process. Because of this mechanism, salience translates not only into issue prominence but also into specific voting behaviors. Nevertheless, as previously noted in the discussion of attribute agenda setting and framing, the priming mechanism understood solely within the bounds of the knowledge activation model's concept of accessibility does not provide an adequate explanation for agenda-setting effects. For example, the question whether the most active or the least active media users are susceptible to the agenda-setting effects is not solved. McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that those who were less knowledgeable of the media agenda followed its accounts more. McKuen and Coombs (1981) and Wanta (1997) think that those with more interest in politics and media coverage of politics are more susceptible to the agenda-setting effects. On the other hand, McLeod and colleagues (1974) and Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) found that the most interested individuals are less affected by the media agenda. The roots of the disagreement might lie in the different types of the need for orientation. But this

need as a motivational factor must trigger a certain psychological process. There are some indications that Petty and Cacioppo's (1981) elaboration likelihood model (the ELM) might offer such a complementary mechanism. The ELM postulates that attitude change, as a result of media or personal influence, may happen both when people are highly involved in the issues and messages and are able to process them as well as when their involvement and ability are low. Although the authors of the ELM maintain that the attitudes become stronger when information processing is more elaborate, they also admit that increased repetition of peripheral cues or having a rehearsal of an attitude position, may enhance the accessibility.

Petty, Priester, and Brinol (2002) also point at the link between the agenda-setting approach and the ELM. They maintain that "by setting the agenda of what is important to evaluate, media can have important 'indirect' effects on attitude change" (p. 167).

Developments in agenda-setting research provide a way to systematically test the characteristics of the messages and the issues beyond the messages. The ELM offers two ways of processing information: It pays serious attention to the role of the message factor in attitude change, and it embraces both the motivation and the ability of the audience to process the information. These features make the ELM one of the very useful tools along with the mechanism of priming for investigation of how agenda setting produces its media effects.

Although the terms *opinions* and *attitudes* are often used interchangeably in political communication, studying how agenda setting is linked to attitudes as more stable predispositions of the public to evaluate the issues on media agenda must be a distinct area in future research. Moreover, a better understanding of this link might boost further contributions to existing findings about the agenda setting/behavior relationship.

Looking to the Future

The first empirical study of the agenda-setting function of media was followed by hundreds of similar studies conducted in different countries. The explanatory and predictive power of accumulated knowledge allows several specific venues of future research in agenda setting to be envisaged, such as studying how new media pose

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challenges for understanding what is a common agenda for the media and the public. Another venue would be going beyond predominantly political communication emphasis into studies of media agenda setting through entertainment and other genres. Researchers can also continue to study the psychological processes in the need for orientation, which switches on the agenda-setting mechanism.

Agenda setting also plays a significant part in the broader social roles of media: surveillance of the larger environment, transmission of culture, and connecting different segments of society together. Furthermore, theoretical development of agenda-setting concepts would illuminate the links between issues as general categories and different attributes and demonstrate how issue and attribute saliences differ in their impact on the public perception of these issues.

Some researchers have expressed concern that the technological change in media with the Internet becoming a more and more dominant source of information will not only diversify the voices but will also lead to the fragmentation of the media and public agendas, with unclear consequences for democracy. Nevertheless, initial studies seemed to dispel these fears. Roberts, Wanta, and Dzwo (2002) demonstrated that there was a correspondence between the issues covered by media and the issues discussed in electronic bulletin boards (EBBs). Other studies reported evidence that the media agenda is still whole, not fragmented as some might argue. Another study showed that the second level of agenda-setting and priming effects of media work continuously in the digital environment. The issue attributes in online papers examined in the study successfully transferred to the attribute salience of the audience.

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The role of entertainment media in the transferal of salience to the public agenda may become an area of serious attention considering the size of the audiences these media command. Holbrook and Hill (2005) found that non-news sources, in their case criminal dramas, heighten the accessibility and salience of certain issues for the viewers, leading to agenda-setting effects.

The agenda-setting paradigm contributes significantly to the current mass communication scholarship by constantly generating studies with fresh approaches

and new angles. The concept of agenda setting has practical applications in academia, journalism, and politics. These are the healthy signs of agenda setting's viability. Moreover, the agenda-setting hypothesis is a part of the ongoing debate about the future of the mass communications field: This debate reflects the interest in agenda setting as one of the tools for truth seeking in the field of communication.

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