Agenda Setting:
Old and New Problems in the Old and New Media

Edited by
Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska,
Bartłomiej Łódzki
and Wayne Wanta
Chapter 2

Refining agenda setting theory for 21st century media and communication research: Setting the new media research agenda

AMIRA FIRDAUS
University of Malaya, Malaysia
University of Melbourne, Australia

Abstract: Drawing upon Maxwell McCombs's (2005) reference to the different evolutionary stages of agenda setting theory, this chapter discusses the challenges of an increasingly user-driven, networked media environment, and explores conceptual adjustments to extend the theory's theoretical scope to user-driven media contexts. The first section highlights the importance of fitting theory to the underlying media environment. Next, the chapter illustrates the divide between agenda setting research and current user-driven media contexts, noting the challenges that new media contexts pose to the validity of traditional methods of agenda setting research. The chapter then proposes that researchers go beyond the media-effects paradigm underlying the agenda setting hypothesis that one agenda (usually the media agenda) has the ability to influence (i.e. set) another agenda (usually the public agenda), to consider other manifestations of salience-transfer, namely the multidirectional flow of different news narratives. Finally, the paper notes agenda setting theory's utility and relevance to research in a new media environment.

Keywords: agenda setting theory, transfer of salience, salience-transfer, new media, Iran elections, media effects, methodological innovation.

Introduction: The call for theory-building in agenda setting

In an introspective summation of agenda setting theory, Maxwell McCombs (2005) noted five stages in the theory's evolution: The first stage of the theory centered upon "basic agenda setting effects" that hypothesized media's influence over public agenda; this included 1990's research on the Internet. The second evolutionary stage saw attention to specific constructs of agenda, namely topic agenda and attribute agenda, and a consequent development of second-level (attribute) agenda setting. In the third stage, research focus centered upon the psychology of agenda setting effects. Agenda setting's fourth evolutionary stage examined the setting of media agenda. Finally, the fifth evolutionary stage refers to research