

AGENDA SETTING: AN ANNOTATED READING LIST

FOUNDATIONS

McCombs, M.E., and Shaw, D.L. (1972) *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36: 176-187.

One of the classic founding works of the field, this paper uses the 1968 presidential campaign as seen through voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, as a proxy for understanding the role of media in educating the public in an election process. The prominence attached to specific issues were correlated with the prominence placed on those issues by the news media and formed the basis of the model of agenda setting.

McCombs, M.E., and Shaw, D.L. (1993). *The Evolution of Agenda-Setting Research: Twenty-Five Years in the Marketplace of Ideas*. *Journal of Communication*. 43(2): 58-67.

A follow-up to their 1972 work, this paper traces the history of agenda setting in communications research in the 25 years since its publication. Surveys the work that had developed during this period and the directions of agenda setting research and its integration with other fields of communication theory. Of interest, invokes the agenda setting role performed by academic literature and the impact of allowing a small number of scholars control the theories and studies that set the tone of the field.

THE MAGIC BULLET MODEL

Jowett, G., Jarvie, I. C., Fuller, K. (1996). *Children and the movies: media influence and the Payne Fund controversy*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Offers an in-depth look at the foundations, motivations, and history of the Payne Fund Studies. Conducted from 1933-1936, these studies, funded by a private foundation, examined the impact of the new medium of motion pictures on American youth. Its alarmist findings helped contribute to the image of the media as a “magic bullet” that could directly control the public opinion.

REJECTION OF THE MAGIC BULLET MODEL

Hargrave, J. (1940). Words Win Wars: Propaganda: The Mightiest Weapon of All. Chapter V.

Chapter V focuses on the differences between “indirect” and “direct” propaganda. Contrary to the magic bullet model, researchers were already recognizing the influence of contextual features on interpretation and this chapter discusses the need to integrate an audience’s “cultural background” into the framing used for a propaganda message. Agenda setting in this paper is now part of a long-term “conditioning process” in which the message is woven into the overall media environment of a group of individuals over a period of time and is specifically tailored towards their unique socio-economic environment.

Lazarsfeld, P.F., Berelson, B. & Gaudet, H. (1948). The people’s choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign. New York: Columbia University Press.

This study evaluated media impact on voter behavior in Erie County Ohio in the 1940 US presidential election. Contradicting the “magic bullet” model of agenda setting, the study finds that interpersonal outlets have a greater impact on voter choice than mass media messages. The book explores group cohesion and mass media messages, and in particular, the conditions under which individuals form homogeneous groups and the circumstances under which those groups fail.

Martinson, David L. (2004) *Media Literacy Education: No Longer a Curriculum Option.* The Educational Forum. 68(2): 154-160.

Explores the impact of agenda setting from the standpoint of educational environments. Contains an excellent historical summary of views on the media’s impact on children, such as the Payne Fund Studies, and discusses the War of the Worlds and its impact on the “Magic Bullet” model of agenda setting.

PROPAGANDA AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Lasswell, H. (1927). Propaganda Techniques in the First World War. New York: Alfred Knopf.

Considered one of the founding works in modern propaganda theory, Harold Lasswell’s book on propaganda use in World War One establishes an analytical framework through which to analyze propaganda material, classifying “value demands” versus “expectations,” defensive and offensive uses of propaganda techniques, and contextualizing persuasion in terms of changing political aims and its manifestation through media output.

Lavine, H., Wechsler, J. (1940). War Propaganda and the United States. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Offers a superb overview of the state of propaganda research in the opening years of World War Two. Opening with the quote “Public opinion no longer is formulated by the slow process of what Professor John Dewey calls shared experience...in our time public opinion is primarily a response to propaganda stimuli,” the book is a strong reflection of the mindset of the media as an all-powerful force for shaping public opinion.

Childs, H., Whitton, J. (1942). Propaganda by Short Wave. Chapter 7 (Techniques of Persuasion).

Chapter seven operationalizes the earlier rejection of the bullet model into the framework of group-stratification used in agenda-setting at the outset of the Second World War. A variety of real case studies from the War are intermixed with the theoretical discussions in this chapter, noting, for example, the way in which German broadcasts targeted Americans of German descent using different propaganda techniques than those of other nationalities.

Military Propaganda. (1953). Psychological Warfare School Special Text ST33-10-1. (Declassified).

Essentially the working “handbook” of propaganda for US military operations, this 59-page booklet covers both white (defensive) and black (offensive) uses of propaganda and summarizes the state of research into framing and priming in the early 1950’s. Offers step-by-step instructions for utilizing the foreign media as an agenda-setting tool.

AGENDA SETTING IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

D’Alessio, D & Allen, M. (2000). *Media Bias in Presidential Elections: A Meta-Analysis*. *Journal of Communication*. 50(4): 133-156.

The 1952 presidential election was the first in which allegations of media bias and agenda setting in the media played a significant role. This paper surveys 59 different media bias studies of US presidential election news coverage in newspapers, television, and newsmagazines and uses a meta-analysis framework to aggregate their findings for coverage, statement, and gatekeeping bias. These three forms of bias are instantiations or indicators of agenda setting in the news media.

Gerbner, G. (1977). Mass Media Policies in Changing Cultures. New York: John Wiley & Sons. Chapter 18 (Comparative Cultural Indicators).

Governments have long sought to use the media as an organ of state control and utilize its persuasive facilities to control public opinion. Agenda setting by explicit state censorship or implicit interaction is viewed through the lens of

cultural repackaging. Gerbner follows the use of media from the state standpoint: "Institutions package, media compose, and technologies release messages into the mainstream of common consciousness."

Shaw, E. F. (1979). *Agenda-Setting and Mass Communication Theory*. *International Communication Gazette*. 25: 96-105.

Explores the evolution of agenda-setting theory. Introduces aspects such as the diffusion model, in which media educates the influential elite, who are then responsible for shaping public opinion, to the rejection of this model. Discusses how the various components of agenda setting interplay and interface with the campaign process.

PRIMING AND FRAMING

Iyengar, S., Simon, A. (1993). *News Coverage of the Gulf Crises and Public Opinion: A Study of Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing*. *Communication Research* 20(3): 365-383.

Offers a case study of the Persian Gulf conflict, using poll data to evaluate the impact of television news coverage through the lenses of agenda-setting, priming, and framing with regards to public opinion of the war and the administration. Shows how these concepts are contextualized within a real media environment and specific event.

Scheufele, D. (2000). *Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication*. *Mass Communication & Society*. 3(2&3): 297-316.

Priming and framing concepts are often viewed as components of agenda setting, and this study offers a historical overview of both in the context of agenda setting research. It develops an analytical model that separates the roles of priming and framing as distinct from agenda setting and discusses their interplay.

Tewksbury, D. & Dietram, A. S. (2007). *Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models*. *Journal of Communication*. 57: 9-20.

Introduces a brief evolutionary history of agenda setting from the 1920's through the 1990's and focuses on the interplay of priming and framing with agenda setting. As with Scheufele, the paper attempts to distinguish the roles of priming and framing as separate from their impact in agenda setting, and specifically around the notions of accessibility and applicability.