



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Application of Agenda-setting, Framing and Propaganda during  
News Production Process**

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The present research is a meta-analysis of agenda-setting, framing and propaganda literature to highlight the application of these three approaches of media effects during news production process. An extensive literature review of these three theories was conducted. It is proposed through this article that the news content that is received by the consumers goes through a complicated process application of different theoretical approaches which help to shape up the final product of a news item and the final news product somehow becomes different then the first hand information. A process model of agenda-setting, framing and propaganda is proposed during news production process. That helps to understand the links present in the above mentioned theoretical approaches

**Introduction**

Audience has access to many sources of information in the form of social media, other local and foreign media outlets and interpersonal communication. This information gathered from other sources also affects public understanding about the issues by providing variety. But mostly readers rely more on the information provided by their favorite news outlets. And very few people are enough interested in the issues that they use information provided by other media outlets for making comparisons. Audiences usually do not know, what happens to the information when it reaches to the newspapers office in its raw form. But in reality there is a long list of process which starts after a news item is received in the

newspaper office. The present article studied those theoretical process and models which affected on the production of a news story. In this connection, agenda setting, framing and propaganda model were discussed in detail. It was sought out how these models affect the formation present in a story and how these three approaches were inter connected. Previous researchers had studied the linkages among agenda setting, framing and priming (Iyengar& Kinder, 1987; McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver, 1997). But no literature was available where all of these three approaches were used together to identify factors involved in the making of a news story. Through the present research, the researchers strived to fill this research gap.

### **News Production Process**

Once the information is received to the news organization, the process of its production begins. There are five major factors which influence news selection and production process: ideological and political orientations of journalists, journalistic routines, social values and norms, interest groups' pressure, and organizational pressures and constraints (e.g., Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). After some news item reaches the newspaper office, along with the bulk of information, before it finds its place in the newspaper it has to go through a lengthy processing. The process of gate-keeping also plays a crucial role in the selection of a news item. But the current research only focused on the agenda-setting, framing and propaganda aspects of news process. So influences on the news content and gate-keeping are two concepts which are beyond the scope of the present research.

### **Media as an Agenda Setter**

On daily bases, the media organizations receive many news stories from several national and international sources. But it was noticed that there were certain news stories which got prominence in media. Media determined the salience of issues by giving more importance to certain issues at the expense of others. According to Dreier and Martin (2010) agenda-setting effects proposed that news media had the ability to decide what should be in the news and so it sets the agenda. When news media treated some issue prominently it made that issue more noticeable for the public.

The original idea of agenda-setting research is to influence the salience of topics but lately it had gone far beyond this simple concept. Now agenda-setting studies also include the transfer of different attributes, qualities and characteristics of the news stories (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997; McCombs, 2005; McCombs,

2014; McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014). And this is because of the emphasized characteristics of the stories that transmission of media agenda to public agenda becomes very easy (Ghanem, 1997; McCombs & Shaw, 1993; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002). With the passage of time agenda setting has incorporated the transfer of salience through how topics are presented (framing of topic attributes by media) (Fortunato & Martin, 2016). Agenda-setting postulates media is successful in not only influencing people what to think about but also how the public will think about these topic (McComb, 2005).

Iyengar and Kinder (1987) stressed that public considered those issues important which got prominent coverage in the news media. Cobb and Elder (1971) introduced the term agenda-building for the first time. Their concern was that "how topics are developed and why it happens that some problems or emerging issues become center of attention for decision makers, while the rest fails" (p. 905). Elites have special interest to make people behave in certain ways so they care a lot about what people think and make every effort to influence them. Politicians presented content in ways which affect agendas, and issues about which people think (Entman, 2007).

Walgrave and Aelst (2004) proclaimed that Agenda setting not only influenced public but also politicians were affected by it. Media had opportunity to choose the content that should be displayed or disregarded. As Weaver (1994) commented that agenda setting process facilitated the media to select the news stories that would dominate the media agenda. But it might be the possibilities the dominant news stories might not represent all issues. He further expressed that "It is not quite accurate, however, to speak of the media as setting agendas if they were mainly passing on the priorities and perspectives of prominent news sources such as politicians and their campaign managers" (p.350). In this context McCombs (2005) argued if media had dispensable role in setting agenda then there was need to explore who set agenda for the media.

Agenda-setting is a theory which had many layers. It studied issues in the first layer and focuses issue attributes which those issues adopt on the second layer. These attributes contribute in making the issue fully understandable for the public. Issue attributes suggest not only the most important aspects of an issue but also make it clear that which aspects are not relevant to it (McCombs & Estrada, 1997). McCombs and Shaw (1993) see agenda-setting and framing as parallel functions. They say "Both the choice of items for consideration and the choice of frames for thinking about these items are influential agenda-setting roles" (p. 62).

McCombs (2005) argues that “what journalists do considerably affect their readers’ pictures of the world”.

### **Framing Process**

Once the content decision-making is done, it is not possible to cover all the aspects of a news story. Like the way all stories are not covered by the media, in the same way not all aspects of a news story are covered by the media outlets. So the function of media is not only to select the topics for publication but another very important function of media is to select the facts and angles which will be included in some news story. This line of theory is called “framing”. Schudson (1998) says that it is the professional responsibility of the journalist to frame the stories.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) defined agenda setting as selection and salience of a particular news story where framing dealt with the projection of specific features of the issue (Entman, 1993). Actually, Framing was the extended form of agenda setting (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997). They referred it as second level of agenda setting. It basically strengthen the original concept of agenda setting that was previously criticized for its simplistic emphasis only on broad topics (Funkhouser, 1973). Kim, Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) argued that second level of agenda setting had greater influence on public opinion regarding the particular attributes of a news story. “The first level of agenda setting is . . . the transmission of object salience... the second level of agenda setting is the transmission of attribute salience” (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar & Rey, 1997, p. 704).

First level of agenda setting was related with the prominence of issues where as second level setting dealt with prominence of news story characteristics (McCombs *et al.*, 1997; McCombs, 2005 & Ghanem, 1997). McCombs *et al.*, (2000) argued that every news story had many hidden qualities that could be related with the main story. Afterwards such presentation of the story could have its impact on the audience. Ghanem (1997) described four areas of second level agenda setting such as sub themes, framing techniques, affective and cognitive essentials. Second level of agenda setting was analyzed by several researcher through different dimensions such as Hester & Gibson (2003) studied financial reporting, Wanta *et al.*, (2004) explored international crisis and Craft and Wanta (2004) analyzed public perception after September 11, attacks. McCombs (2005) argued that second level agenda setting or framing basically dealt with view point of media and the audience. Moreover, the important factor was that elements the news organization wanted to manipulate or highlight for their public.

Many studies have examined the elements which influence the news production (e.g., Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). But very few researches have focused on the factors which affect the framing of news during news production process. Framing is the main procedure which journalists and governments adopt to influence the public (Riker, 1986). It is determined at this step that which aspects of the issue will be highlighted and shared with the public. This is also called second level agenda setting. Mass media present frames by embedding them in news, which reflect the thoughts and ideologies of journalists (Stout & Buddenbaum, 2003). Van Dijk (1996) argues that ideologies of journalists affect their thoughts, which are mirrored in the editorials and opinion articles written by them. Politicians consider frames very important to gain their objectives because frames present some aspects of the reality and leave the rest (Entman, 1989; Riker, 1986).

The frames which media presents are called media frames (Scheufele, 1999). These can be defined as the main plot of a story that gives meaning to the description of a story. The frame tells about the problem, the crux of the controversy (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p. 143). By using media frames journalists can readily detect and categorize issues to efficiently disseminate them to audience (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Like agenda-setting, framing research also has three separate dimensions: frame-building, frame-setting, and individual level outcomes of framing (Scheufele, 2000).

Goffman (1974) assumed that it is very difficult for human beings to understand the world directly so they try to understand the world around them according to their own life experiences by continuously interpreting and classifying their own life. The frames developing this way are either natural frames or societal frames. Natural frames are the ones which are occurring naturally without any environmental intrusion. On the contrary societal frames are used to "to identify, perceive, locate and label" (Goffman, 1974, p. 21) those events which are developed due to some deliberate human activity. The effect of this approach in the news media is that there are numerous ways of presenting events in the news media and it depends on the journalists which framework do they employ. Goffman (1974) also described it that, "the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied" (p. 24).

The way journalists frame an issue is influenced by many factors including organizational and societal variables (e.g, Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and by ideological or individual frames (e.g., Tuchman, 1978). Frames serve as journalistic routines to quickly divide the information and to package it for efficient relay to

their audiences (Gitlin, 1980). Although journalists themselves do not have much authority in shaping frames but they have the right to ask questions so they have the power to choose words and images to collect and transmit information. Choice of words, information dissemination or suppression, and timing are factors which support the government to enjoy more control in framing issue as compared to other elites (Entman, 2003).

Here it was pertinent to explore what were the factors which influenced framing process. Cobb and Elder (1972) mentioned that journalists, media organizations and structural factors influenced the framing of a news story. In this regard, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) added that political connections of the media organization, journalist's personal influence, news sources, political parties, senior journalists, official authorities and pressure groups exert their influence in the framing of a news story in a particular context. Likewise, Carragee and Roefs (2004) narrated that political elites, organizations and other social groups were involved in the formulation of a news story. However, Entman (2004) in his Cascading model' pointed towards the influence of US government in the framing of news stories. It was narrated that in the case of foreign affairs, the White house guided the media organizations and other government officials regarding the framing of a news story. Afterwards, the public response helped the government to restructure their stance. However, Gamson and Modigliani (1989) stressed on three other aspects that affected the framing process namely; media customs, sponsor activities and cultural perspective. They argued that when cultural resonance and advertiser's conditions matched with media customs, consequently it produced specific frame for the story.

On the other hand, Pan and Kosicki (2001) gave a different idea that it's not always the political elites who dominated framing process but sometimes, public opinion had great importance. When the public discussed some issues, communicated with people around them, consumed different media sources, they established shared perception. In this way, framing process was influenced by multi-dimensional factors, in which the media operated (Pan & Kosicki, 2001). However, certain researchers commented that public perception significantly affected framing process. It could not be stated that framing effects were general (Druckman, 2001, 2004; Brewer, 2005; Druckman& Nelson, 2003).

Here it was important to identify the location of frames in a news story. In this case, Entman (1993) stated that there were certain places from where the frames could be identified such as key words, symbols, graphics, sources and story structure. Furthermore, Tankard (2001) provided detailed techniques for

identifying frames from the text. Such as headlines of the story, selected visuals, photo titles, lead of the story, sources, selection of the statements, logos, and statistics and concluding remarks. Overall, these were the elements which facilitated the researcher to identify the frames from the story.

### **Propaganda Techniques**

At the third step different propaganda techniques are embedded to spin the facts and to achieve the desired results. People perceive the importance of message on the basis of its repetition in the media. It means that if a propagandist present some issue in media more prominently than others, people will definitely perceive that issue as more important than issues (Curnalia, 2005). A continuous propaganda campaign can influence public agenda and can even change it by presenting some issues more saliently than others (Curnalia, 2005).

Lasswell(1995) commented that “propaganda in its broadest sense is the technique of influencing human action by the manipulation of representations (Lasswell, 1995: 1). Lasswell’s propaganda is all communication aiming to influence human actions (1937). Catlin (1936) concurred Lasswell’s idea of propaganda, that propaganda is a way, through which views are put in the minds of people without any sense of political or moral pressure.

Schramm (1955) analyzed propaganda in Germany and Britain and concluded that to convince people the best way is to target the prestigious, local opinion leaders by providing the related facts, impartially presented and giving them the liberty to conclude and tell the public. The main strategy used by British government was to retain the look of impartiality even while employing propaganda.

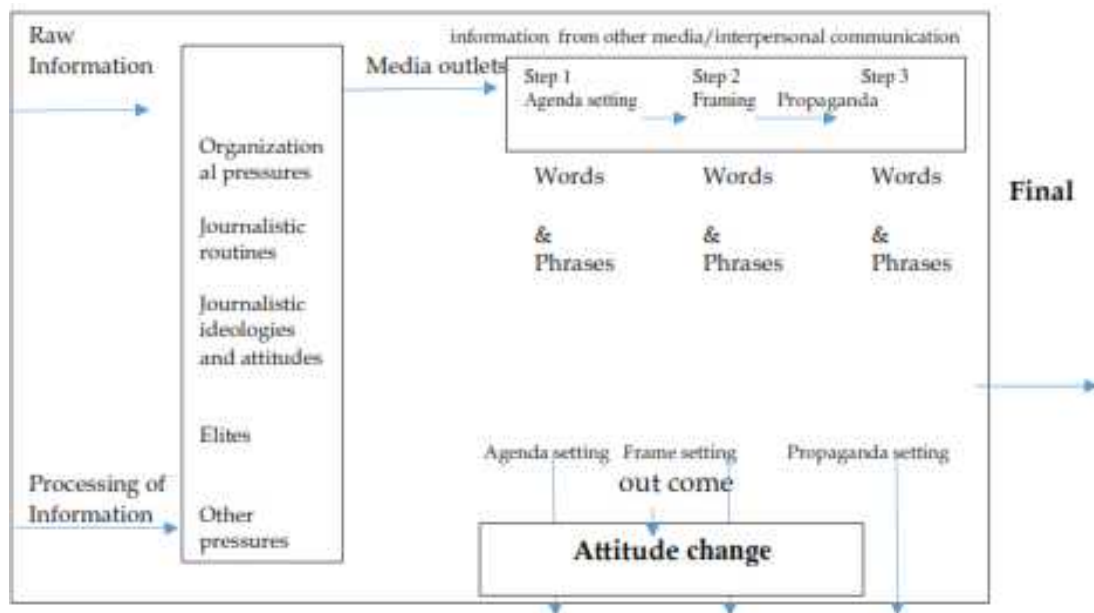
Generally propaganda is understood as communication that intentionally deceives its receivers (Pratkanis & Aronson, 1991). Propaganda could be divided into three types, i.e. gray propaganda, black propaganda and Hummel and Huntress (1949) demarcated propaganda as “any attempt to persuade anyone to a belief or to a form of action” (p.2). They call it a “planned attack on people’s belief” (p.4), transmitted via “newspapers, personal contacts, magazines, books radio programs, and pictorial media such as the theatre, television and motion pictures” (p.4).

Propaganda theory proposed that the rational mind was only an imagination, which cannot resist the influential content of media. Magic bullet theory was greatly criticized. But on the contrary the advocates give many

examples of its influence, like the program produced on H G Wells novel, “*Invasion from Mars*”, broadcasted by Mercury Theatre (Lowery & DeFleur, 1994). Hummel and Huntress (1949) demarcated propaganda as “any attempt to persuade anyone to a belief or to a form of action” (p.2). They call it a “planned attack on people’s belief” (p.4), transmitted via “newspapers, personal contacts, magazines, books radio programs, and pictorial media such as the theatre, television and motion pictures” (p.4).

Though propaganda is a very influential tool but some techniques are required to incorporate it. Seven propaganda techniques were the most prominent anti-propaganda framework developed by the Filene-Miller Institute (later became ‘Institute of Propaganda Analysis’) (Goodman, 2011). The purpose of this institute was to help public avoid the propaganda seduction. Opinion leaders leapt towards these seven techniques to counter the confusing war of the words of that time. These techniques are name-calling, testimonial, transfer, glittering-generalities, bandwagon, card-stacking and plain folks. Many others also identified other techniques of propaganda like Cozma (2015) identified fear/reassurances; Tilley (2005) identified binary frames of “us versus them”. Censorship is another propaganda tool but it is not possible for every propagandist to use censorship or use lies (Udelepp, 2008). So, censorship is applied to the interpretation and explanation of the facts. Ellul (1973) suggested that lying should not be adopted but propagandist can change and alter the context and fact presentation style. Walton maintains that arguments are mistaken when speakers use emotions instead of logic to conclude some argument (*ad populum*), also cause action by gaining sympathies (*ad misericordiam*). Misconceptions are also developed when fear is incited to make conclusion acceptable (*ad baculum*).





Process Model of Agenda Setting, Framing and Propaganda Techniques

Scriver (2015) establishes through examples that Lasswell's (1927) 'attaching guilt to the enemy' and Hadamovsky's (1933) 'ridicule' are exactly like IPA's (1939) name calling. Card stacking was also used in Gulf War 1991. Association is like the IPA's transfer. During Gulf War 1991 'rich' and 'powerful' was used for Iraq and 'smaller' and 'peaceful' was used for Kuwait. Terms like honor, liberty, freedom that are examples of glittering generalities were used. Hadamovsky's (1933) and Lasswell's (1927) concept of 'unified will' and IPA's 'bandwagon' were also clearly seen. Scriver further establishes that people assume that media provide neutral information and give the status of 'testimonials' to media. Although in reality media provides the point of view of elites but people start following it without doubting its actual position.

As discussed above, propaganda is a strategy through which truth is manipulated to influence the public opinion. When content is received by the media organization they once again manipulate the content according to their policies, ideologies, political and governmental pressures. After that the information that disseminated to the public was transformed by the media organizations.

### **Inclusion of Agenda, Framing and Propaganda in News Process**

During information processing such words and phrases are used which helped to get the desired results. Newsmen and organizations embed phrases, words and images as well as those mentally stored and produced through metaphors, to understand and define different situations and issues and these pictures may form audience behavior and attitudes about those situations and issues (Nelson, et al., 1997). These embedded words and phrases contribute to the process of frame-setting and agenda-setting in the audience. Van Dijk (1996) maintains that ideologies are showed by using words, perspectives, sentences, etc., which demonstrate the ideological prejudice of the mass media. The outcome of frame-setting, agenda-setting and propaganda techniques is not possible without the inclusion of suitable language. Once the propaganda techniques gain their way in the audience they lead to finalize the processes of agenda-setting and frame-setting, which ultimately leads to attitude change.

It is not necessary that all these three steps in the information processing are always conscious efforts of the news men. Many a times the results are produced without any intention from the news men. Either consciously or unconsciously, agendas and frames are set by employing suitable propaganda techniques and using lexical choices of words. The model is given below.

### **Conclusion**

The present research is based on meta-analysis of agenda-setting, framing and propaganda literature to establish the application of these approaches of media effects during news production process. It was established that all three of these approaches are incorporated in the information at one stage or another during the news production process. It studied that how raw news was received by the news organization. Afterwards, organizational pressures, journalistic routines, journalistic ideologies and other pressures influenced the processing of the news. Accordingly, the media organization set its agenda regarding the particular issue. In next step the particular issue was framed in certain perspective by including some information or by excluding some facts. Later on, different propaganda techniques highlight the desired content among the public which afterwards affect the public perception of the society. Media organizations are considered as opinion-leaders. When people get information from these organizations they heavily rely and trust this information. But they are kept unaware of the fact that news does not reach to them as first-hand account of information but multiple factors influence it at multiple levels. This article would

be helpful to open new horizons of intellectual discourse for academicians of media studies and researchers and would also be very beneficial for the consumers of news content to understand the real standing of news content.

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