


Chapter 1

Agenda–Setting and Framing Theories: Perspectives on Digital and Social Media Fragmentation and Convergence

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ABSTRACT

Recent media literature shows that agenda-setting theory has faced several critical challenges, including information processing, identity and affiliation, cultural connection, and environment. The foundational premise for agenda-setting is that the media play a major role in setting and deciding the issues for consumers. On the other side, the framing theory creates a shape or a frame for issues to be presented to the audience. This research proposes that despite the many changes and challenges in the media environment, both theories are still able to influence the choices the consumers make about gathering and processing media content. As a historical reference, the 1968 study by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 laid the ground for the application of the agenda-setting theory and its effect on media messages. The scope of this chapter sheds light on the “distinguish genuine agenda setting” and the “pseudo agenda setting” in digital and social media fragmentation and convergence environment. An analytical discussion of the main components of media convergence is discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Technology and its functionality are subject to stages of Recent media literature showing that agenda-setting theory has faced several critical challenges, including information processing, identity and affiliation, cultural connection, and environment.

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the ground for the application of the agenda-setting theory and its effect on media messages. The scope of this paper sheds light on the “distinguish genuine agenda setting” and the “pseudo agenda setting” in digital and social media fragmentation and convergence environment. An analytical discussion of the main components of media convergence (industrial, cultural, social, technical, and textual) is provided.

In reviewing an international book “Communication and Democracy” edited by Maxwell McCombs, Donald L. Shaw, and David Weaver (1997), James W. Dearing highlighted that the theoretical relationship between the historically construed “agenda-setting effect,” in which “media set the agenda for what audience members consider important, and media framing, the meanings that characterize mass media news content. The task is ambitious, the chapters by and large interesting, and, for scholars interested in agenda setting, the book is an important contribution” (p. 126).

The argument focuses on the public agenda setting and the influence of the media agenda on the public agenda. It goes a full circle. For example, the public agenda pushes by policymakers, the media highlights what it thinks is important, and pushes back to the audience with specific focus and framing. The aim here is a more” expansive understanding of how the mass media affect their audiences” (Dearing, 1998, p. 126). James Dearing added “The process of framing is conceptualized not just as closely related to agenda setting, but within the agenda-setting paradigm (p. 126).

BACKGROUND

For any society to grow steadily, it needs the full participation and contribution of its citizens. Traditional outlet media and social media could play a major role in creating a participatory environment for the audience. However, media corporations prioritize the bottom line, focusing on profitability and financial returns. They aim to create content and distribution channels that will generate profits. In doing so, media corporations have inadvertently fostered division among their audiences, leading to uncontrollable competition, fragmentation, and tribalism. They have their agenda, and they frame a news story, an event, or a public or private occurrence as they see fit. In the words of veteran journalist and anchor Carol Marin “As long as I’ve been a reporter people have accused the media of having an agenda” (Uiaa.org. para 25). She also said “I’m not an advocate reporter. My job is to tell a story and let the people get outraged” (Uiaa.org. para 25). The public experience with the media is a mix of mistrust, offense, and indifference. Global media and communication technologies are the highlights of the 21st Century. The central concern for professionals and scholars has been how digital media and social media content and delivery systems are significantly impacted by the ever-fast-changing communication technologies to the extent that media organizations are continually searching for creative ways to stay in business and to remain competitive (Al-Obaidi & Covington, 2007).

Historically, students of the media were studying what is known as Frederick S. Siebert’s four theories of the press. Siebert’s four theories include authoritarian, totalitarian, libertarian, and social responsibility. Along this side, other cultural theories were considered including social cognitive theory, uses and gratification theory, and media democracy. The uses and gratification theory examines the media from a humanistic perspective. Meanwhile, the modern media ecology theory examines how media influence human perception, understanding, interpretation, and social values. Sieber’s and other media theories are still applicable to digital media and social media. However, the politicization of media is not healthy for the sustainability of the democratic process. Hence, it becomes essential to study the most effective theories, such the Agenda Setting and Framing. It’s the purpose of this chapter. The study of

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