

Is Agenda-setting a Magic Bullet?

"...the mass media set the agenda for each political campaign, influencing the salience of attitudes toward the political issues."

McCombs & Shaw, 1972

According to a research conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1972), media emphasis on different campaign issues tended to affect voters' judgment of the salience of various campaign issues, which manifested agenda-setting function of news media.

Agenda setting refers to media practice that distinguishes between major issues and minor issues by distributes its resources (e.g. the amount of information, staff, headlines) differently to various events and topics. The selection and arrangement is based on certain news value criteria, which derive from daily practice and the knowledge of audiences' appetite.

Daily briefing is a common form of agenda setting practice in news media. Here is an example from CNN's official Twitter account:

<https://twitter.com/CNN/status/961212977549664256>

CNN listed 5 events that their editors believed were of the greatest importance. Political activities (and other events related to elite persons), international (sport) events and natural disasters (and other negative news) are commonly acknowledged as newsworthy. Although in some cases news media is severely biased, they have basic consensus on news value. (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)

Another example is from @Reuters:

<https://twitter.com/Reuters/status/961250198180810752>

Despite the news events, this news agency also attached importance to information and story about their sponsor brand, Amazon, which indicates that agenda setting process does not merely depend on news value.

However, McCombs and Shaw's study (1972) also proved that audiences had composite understanding about media contents. That is to say, agenda-setting practice has limited influence on audiences. It reminds politicians who utilize the agenda-setting function of the significance of monitoring and analyzing audiences' media use, as knowledge about their real preference helps

seize potential supporters.

Reference

McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). [The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media](http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/267990). *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/267990>