

# A note from one of the founders

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Agenda setting has been a productive theoretical platform for half a century, expanding from the tightly focused Chapel Hill study on the influence of news coverage on the public's perception of the most important issues of the day to a multi-faceted theory about the influence of media on the formation of public opinion on numerous topics. The core theoretical concept of the transfer of salience between two agendas has been complemented by additional concepts that elaborate the theory. Among these key conceptual additions are need for orientation, introduced by David Weaver; compelling arguments by Salma Ghanem; agenda melding by Donald Shaw, and network agenda setting by Lei Guo and myself. These additions to the theory in tandem with other concepts and empirical findings have enriched agenda-setting research.

As a result, to invoke my favorite fictional sleuth, Sherlock Holmes, agenda-setting research subsequent to Chapel Hill has pursued a continuing stream of intriguing scholarly mysteries and puzzles. The agenda-setting literature is a casebook of investigations by many Sherlock Holmes into the specific elements of media messages that influence the public's perception of the topics of the day as well as their attitudes, opinions and behavior regarding these topics. The success and continued growth of agenda-setting theory, more than 500 journal articles to date, is due in considerable measure to dozens of scholars in Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America who have contributed to our picture of media influence on the formation of public opinion. For me it is gratifying to be part of this international community of scholars and to have made so many friends across the world.

As a member of this international community, I have witnessed a continuing explication of the specific elements of media messages that resonate with the public. Beginning in Chapel Hill and subsequent studies with the focus of the media on a limited number of topics, a perspective now referred to as the first level of agenda setting, scholars expanded their perspective to explore a second level of agenda setting, the set of attributes for each of these topics in the media that fill out its picture in the minds of the public. Subsequent research investigated the role of specific attributes in the media coverage that can drive the salience of an issue or

other topic, the concept of compelling arguments, and most recently, the impact of network agenda setting, how these objects and/or attributes are associated with each other in the media and among the public. Complementing this ongoing explanation of key message elements is the research on the psychology of agenda setting, the origins of the media agenda, and the consequences of agenda-setting effects for attitudes and opinions and behavior as key components of agenda-setting theory.

During my graduate student days at Stanford University, theory became firmly cemented at the top of my personal agenda. Not a particular theory, rather the general notion of scientific theory as a highly practical intellectual device both for organizing what we know about a particular domain and for stimulating and guiding the continued expansion of our knowledge about that domain. This was in large measure due to the regular interjections of Wilbur Schramm that there is nothing as practical as a good theory. Taken as a whole, the history of agenda setting is a large scale case study of the scientific method, a tapestry constructed from theory and empirical investigations.

Empirically, agenda setting evolved from an election setting in Chapel Hill and many subsequent elections worldwide to a broad view of public opinion and beyond public affairs to a variety of other settings, including corporate reputations, cultural activities and products, and religious practice. An important by-product of this expansion to a variety of topics in many geographic settings has been multiple research designs employing a wide variety of research methods. Contemporary agenda-setting research has moved far beyond the tandem use of content analysis and survey research in Chapel Hill.

The diversity of contemporary agenda-setting research underscores the utility of a journal focused specifically on agenda setting rather than research scattered in a multiplicity of journals across the world. *The Agenda Setting Journal* will bring together in a single scholarly arena many of the continuing contributions to the theory. Metaphorically, this new journal will be the academic equivalent of going to a major league baseball game and observing the performance and contributions all in one arena of established players, rising stars, and promising newcomers.

The inauguration of *The Agenda Setting Journal* is a benchmark occasion for the founding fathers of agenda setting, Donald Shaw, David Weaver, and me, to survey with pride the contributions of our students and now their students, the third and fourth generation of agenda setting scholars, as well as many, many others. To again invoke Sherlock Holmes, the game is afoot!

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