

Research Assessment #7

Date: 1/10/2021

Subject: New Media Theories (Agenda Setting)

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Assessment:

For this week's assessment, I wanted to shift my focus back on the journalism and media aspect of my area of study since we have now concluded our Original Work projects. The topic I decided to look into this week was the different social phenomena that have emerged in recent years with the increased use of social media and news broadcasting to deliver information on current world events. My source came from my Communications 1010 textbook from the first semester where there was an entire chapter dedicated to different occurrences and how they influence the way the general public receives and processes information.

The chapter I looked into mentioned several situations that I found very interesting but the one that I found most interesting was the idea of agenda-setting. As stated at the beginning of the chapter "agenda-setting theory is based on the assumption that the media has a strong influence on audiences" (McCombs & Shaw 1972). The theory dictates that different forms of news media target the subconscious appeals of their audiences in order to convince them of the importance/ significance of different events over others. An example of this in print news is where a story is located and how it is positioned in a newspaper. For example, it is generally understood that if a story is positioned on the front page of the paper it must be regarded as very significant but then a story located deep within the smaller print of the paper would be considered filler. This is also true for digital media like news broadcasts. Stories that are seen as breaking will be given the spotlight and will make up the bulk of a production line up. This is clearly seen in the current news cycle with the attack on the U.S. Congressional Complex and how it has flooded television coverage across nearly every mainstream news outlet.

The organization of news media is one aspect of agenda-setting theory but for it to work it is dependent on three different variables. These include people's selective informational intake, homogeneous networks, and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007). Firstly an individual's selective informational intake means that individuals curate and choose what news sources and topics they would like to observe. This can cause issues because people will almost always gravitate towards sources that confirm their own ideas. This is a part of two other phenomena mentioned in the chapter called belief echo chambers and confirmation bias. Echo chambers are a concept used to describe a "safe space" for individuals to go to where their beliefs are

repeated. This creates an echoing effect where their own ideas are constantly being voiced back at the individual and they are further entrenched in their current view and are less likely to accept conflicting information. Confirmation bias is the tendency for an individual to actively seek out information that confirms their beliefs and to ignore or negate ones that challenge it. The second variable is the development of homogeneous networks. These networks tend to form as a social group of individuals that are like-minded and are less likely to present conflicting ideas. These networks create an atmosphere that makes it easier for echo chambers to develop because this group of individuals is only sharing information they all agree on instead of expanding their ideas and perspectives. Thirdly the final variable of agenda setting's effectiveness is an individual's pre-existing attitudes beliefs. This variable means that people will develop their perceptions of information through their individualized lens that was formed from their life experiences. An example of this could be seen through the saying of "two sides of the same coin" where two people can be looking at the same topic or event but can see something different because of how they look at it. All of these different variables come into play when individuals develop their beliefs and views and then search for media that supports them. Once they find one they like these variables paired with echo chamber and confirmation bias phenomena will only further entrench their views on those ideas.

While researching agenda-setting theory it further boosted my belief that it should be more common for people to observe multiple sources that differ from their personal beliefs and attitudes in order to get a larger perspective and develop their own perception of events instead of just being fed their ideas by news media. When people get more and more tied to certain ideals it drives a wedge between individuals and can cause a breakdown of communities as I mentioned earlier with the occurrence of the Capital Hill riot earlier last week. IF people could broaden their ideas the opportunity for compromise and understanding would increase which would bring people together.