新媒體環境下的經典傳播理論

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「議程設置研究仍會是一大重要領域。基於最初假設的研究仍在持續進行，而關於新領域的探索亦不曾間斷。在第一層議程設置——顯著性研究減弱之際，第二層議程設置——屬性研究已受關注。目前，第三層議程設置（包含網絡議題）業已興起。新興研究總會取代舊的領域，未來亦將如此。究其不衰之根本，在於議程設置研究始終在探索一個重要命題：人對其所處之社會環境的感知過程。」

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How to Re-Thrive?
Reconsideration of Classic Communication Theory in the New Media Environment

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Abstract

Professor Wayne Wanta, a leading scholar in the research on agenda setting, looks back and traces his research program development. With a prolific body of research work, Professor Wanta first shares in this dialogue his views about to what extent the theory is limited with respect to effect-orientation. He then delineates the conditions and contextual factors in which the theory is effective. In addition to his reflections on the conditional factors, Professor Wanta explicates the challenge and opportunity for agenda-setting theory in the digital era. Finally, Professor Wanta shares his view of future research in this area.

鳴謝

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韋恩・旺塔教授簡介

　　韋恩・旺塔教授 (Prof. Wayne Wanta) 任教於佛羅里達州大學 (University of Florida) 的新聞系，是國際著名的傳播學者。Wanta 教授曾任「新聞與大眾傳播教育學會」(Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication，AEJMC) 的主席，更兩次代表 AEJMC 出席世界新聞教育會議。目前，他到訪過全球 40 個國家授課以及分享研究成果。

　　旺塔教授著作豐碩，共出版超過 200 篇學術論文，以及 8 本學術書籍。其研究範圍主要圍繞媒體效果、政治傳播、輿論調查。早在其修讀博士學位的期間，就已經對議程設置 (agenda-setting) 及上述範疇之間的關係尤感興趣。在議程設置研究方面，他著有超過 30 篇學術文章，在此方面進行過不少的研究和教學項目。我們很榮幸邀請到議程設置方面的專家旺塔教授展開學術對談。

WW: Wayne Wanta

CH ：黃懿慧

CH: 是甚麼啟發您第一個議程設置的研究？您是否認同議程設置理論的基本假設是線性溝通及單向信息流動？您同意議程設置理論更傾向是有限效果導向的理論嗎？換言之，媒體未必能有力影響您的態度或行為，但可以影響您關注的議題。

WW: 我對議程設置最初的興趣部份源自當時環境，另一部分是我的思維邏輯。我曾在報章行業任職版面設計／排版部主管。因此，我首次聽到「大眾媒體無需告訴人們想甚麼，而是告訴他們要關注的議題」的講法時，我當下就認為：「這是理所當然的。」因為這就是我賴以為生的工作——我告訴人們甚麼是值得他們關注的重要議題。我在報業工作期間，曾在德州的達拉斯及奧斯汀工作。我在德州大學 (University of Texas) 研究院讀書的時候，認識到當時新到任的系主任 Max McCombs。我們很快便成為好朋友。

　　很久以前，人們認為議程設置是單向的媒體效果轉移的理論模型。對此，Max 總會說：「議題無處不在。」人們的議題來自不

同的範疇：人際傳播、現實經驗、以至現時的社交媒體。議程設置的過程仍然無處不在——人們變得更關心各方事項，這個過程也相對變得更為複雜。

的確，議程設置在一個有限媒體效果模型盛行的時間興起。但這並不代表議程設置的效果在今日就可以被忽視。新聞媒體具有效果，但這效果更多是認知上的，即社會學習過程。認知效果很重要，但卻未必如態度或行為效果般有力。在很多情況下，這個認知效果是正面的：人們可以了解到社會中重要的事項。而了解世界不正是人們使用媒體的原因嗎？因此，認知效果雖然不是最有力卻是不容忽視的。簡而言之，這種效果應該被視為一種調節效果。

CH: 您在一次演講中提及議程設置的五部曲（假設、媒體議題、權變因素、政策議題、議題歸因）。能否請您進一步詮釋？您認為是否可以從理論上說明這五部曲？

WW: 原本的議程設置假設提出的是一個信息轉移的過程。媒體報導一個事情，人們閱讀相關報道，進而對報道中事情更為關注。這是自然而然的過程，但當然每個人受到的影響程度不盡相同。因此有相關文獻主要著重探討強化或弱化「媒體－公眾關係」的因素。他們研究過程的開始，即媒體議題是如何被建構、被影響。他們考究媒體與公眾之間的關聯點，即影響媒體傳達信息以及公眾接收信息的因素，文獻中這些因素稱為「權變因素」。研究人員亦探討過程結束的階段，即媒體報導和公眾關注是否足以推動公務人員以實際行動回應。換言之，如果媒體及公眾表示關注，相關的公務人員是否會就議題作出回應？目前文獻研究過程起始、期間、結束的各項因素。第五個步驟就是觀察在不同議題類別下的同一過程：人們是否會將從新聞報道中了解的議題與現實的歸因連結起來？第二層議程設置更為複雜，提出媒體將歸因或特質聯繫至人、地、物。媒體可能對不同因素進行不同的歸因。而公眾了解到這些報道的規律之後，某程度上就會將媒體的歸因方式應用於現實生活。

將議程設置理論化首先要提出假設：媒體報道影響公眾對議題重要性的優次排序。議程設置的其他枝幹研究主要均源自於這個假設。

CH: **您的研究拓展了議程設置理論的範疇。第二層議程設置提出媒體歸因對受眾態度的影響，進而影響行為變化。您認為這多大程度拓展一個經典理論的理論知識？您認為第二層議程設置多大程度上蛻變成態度或行為的形成或改變？或者說，您認同第二層議程設置是否重回強大效果的傳播理論？最後，您在多大程度認同第二層議程設置仍然保留議程設置理論的研究初衷？**

WW: 第二層議程設置比較複雜。它仍然根據原本的假設，再進一步提出對於公眾「議題」的影響。其實就只是議題的不同。人們會有各種議題，我就偏好體育議題。我非常喜歡一隊名為 Green Bay Packers 的足球隊。同時，我也關注其他隊伍，但根據媒體報道，其他隊伍時而傳出醜聞。例如，這些隊伍其中一個隊員可能因為家庭暴力的指控被起訴。看了這些報道，我很可能就會在我「心愛的球隊」這一議題中，降低對該隊的評價。我可能會認為家暴是重要的事情（第一層議程設置），但同時家暴亦是鏈接到球員及隊伍的評價歸因（第二層議程設置）。在這個情況，我不但受到認知歸因（家庭暴力）的影響，更受情感歸因（負面態度）的影響。質言之，第二層包含認知及情感的影響，比最初第一層議程設置更為強大。有些研究通過互聯網去了解公眾關注的議題，但這些研究經常忽略一個重點。他們經常以認知影響為假設，但事實上網絡評論中表現出的公眾關切卻遠不止於認知層面。當然，有人還是同最初假設般，因閱讀媒體的報道而對報導的議題變得關注。但也有人會因對新聞報道的關注而採取進一步的行動，例如在網上撰寫與議題相關的評論。此時，這種影響就是行為性，而非認知性。而這些評論又會有機會傳達給更多其他受眾。

正如我的親身經歷，我住在佛羅里達州，這裡靠近墨西哥灣的海岸線。幾年前，這個港灣發生了漏油事件。我的三位朋友馬上在臉書（Facebook）發起「杯葛BP石油」的活動（"Boycott BP

Oil")。他們並未親身目睹漏油事件——他們分別住在伊利諾州、加州、俄克拉何馬州,並不鄰近海岸。但他們在新聞媒體讀到的報道令他們在臉書貼出連結。當我看到這則帖子,我認為我也應該重視這個情況。也就是說,我的朋友在受媒體議題影響下,再進一步影響了我的議題。這跟兩級傳播理論有異曲同工之妙。媒體報道影響意見領袖的議題,由他們篩選信息,再傳達給受眾。

CH: 根據您的研究,不同的事情會有不同程度的議程設置影響。有些議題,例如移民、稅務、醫療,會有較強的影響力;相反其他議題,像是墮胎則未必。您認為在多大程度上議程設置效果的不同是源自議題的性質差異?更重要的是,在效果與議題之間的關係,是否存在任何模式?

WW: 有很多因素影響議程設置。人並不是被動接受信息的機器人。有很多的變量會影響效果,這亦是議程設置研究的迷人之處。如果議程設置在所有情況均大同小異,那麼這個範疇的研究就會相當沉悶,也就沒有甚麼值得研究。

人們有不同的專注模式。他們亦有不同的資訊處理系統。有些人會關注相對較少的議題。比方說墮胎,對於某些人來講,墮胎議題的重要性,可能不限於媒體報道。無論媒體報道劇減或暴增,對這些人來說都沒影響,因為墮胎本身已經是他們生活中非常重要的議題。

在一般情況下,人們需要透過媒體了解議題。比如很少人會親身經歷校園槍擊案,但大都會看媒體報道的槍械問題,只有透過媒體報道,一般人才可能了解這些問題。不過,個人經歷亦可在議程設置扮演重要角色。我可能去加油站加油時發現車用汽油價格上升。這就會刺激我去關注高油價的議題消息,縱然在此之前我未必讀過相關報道。而我在此之後讀到油價相關的報道,又可能反過來會強化我早前的經歷體驗,令我二度關注到這個議題。因此,個人的經歷可以影響或強化議程設置效果。您就會了解到不同議題對不同的人的影響存在差異。

當然,還是有某些一致的趨勢可通過研究習得。抽象的議題

(例如美國的財政赤字)相對於實際的議題(如犯罪)具備較低的影響力。我從未看過一萬億美金,因此我很難想像財政赤字。然而,我看過血腥的槍林彈雨(縱然是在電影或電視劇中),或至少我能想像槍擊的畫面,因此這個議題對我有較深的影響。

CH: 情境化因素也有可能是造成不同媒介效果的原因,比如您曾經做過的美國與台灣之比較研究:文化因素、人口特徵等皆有可能影響公共議題。以此論之,您認為情境化或本土化可以為經典理論帶來新的活力嗎?若是,能否對此類研究提供幾點建議?

WW: 將近百年之前,Walter Lippmann就曾講過,新聞報導的本土化與情境化可以在公眾心中勾勒出議題的面貌。這一點當然重要,如果公眾無法明白其議題是甚麼,他們自然也無法理解該議題之意義。例如,一個關於水污染的報導或許可以在某種程度上設置議題,但是若該報導可以被情境化(比如水污染如何導致居家飲用水的不安全),其議程設置之影響將被放大。因為即使未親眼見過水污染的人,也能通過媒體報導了解被污染的水是如何進入家中的。

此外,還有許多個人因素亦會影響我們如何感知世界。比如受教育程度,已有許多研究發現其對議程設置影響頗深。教育程度高的人往往具備更高的理解能力,他們更能理解議題之重要性,因此也較容易受議程設置的影響。我也曾就此提議,議程設置研究應與知識溝研究相結合,然而研究者對理論的應用常常是涇渭分明的。但若我們將其結合來看,可以發現許多新問題:教育程度較高者更容易受議程設置的影響,這是否意味著在重要議題這一事件上會產生新的知識溝?若情況如此,對於整個社會又將有何種影響?

CH: 我們已進入平台紛繁的數字媒體時代,您覺得當下對議程設置理論最大的挑戰為何?

WW: 我認為較大的挑戰,是能否辨明議程設置的理論假設基礎。如之前所言,通過網絡帖子內容來研究公眾關注,實為行為效果之研究,而非最初假設之認知效果,這樣一來議程設置的因變量亦隨

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之改變。Dave Weaver 在之前的會議中亦提及類似的問題,認為許多網絡研究或為「議題興趣」而非「議題關注」。舉例而言,幾年前,我看到一則故事,説高中女生流行咀嚼煙草,當時我幾乎整天將此事掛於嘴邊。但是,我顯然並不認為女生抽煙是社會重大問題,而是僅僅對此事感興趣而已。將此事置於今日之網絡情境亦同理,假如我在 Facebook 上發佈此事,我的朋友亦點贊或回應,看似受關注但實則少有人會將它作為議題,僅僅是感興趣而已。因此,在網絡言論的研究中,十分有必要區分「興趣」與「關注」。

CH: 議程設置研究中,常常需要關注時間滯後性問題(即從接收新聞報導到感知議題重要性所需之時間)。但在新媒體環境下,人們面臨著信息量超載與注意力低下等問題,您認為這對議程設置研究會否有影響?

WW: 我認為網絡與社交媒體的影響已經不言而喻,如今人們接觸的信息量已達空前規模,而他們也在逐漸適應這一現狀。部份人對此的應對方式是儘量簡化信息,因此他們往往要求得到直接答案,而不願深究。比如美國的 John Kerry 事件,這位戰爭英雄曾經救過許多人,但卻因抗議 George W. Bush 而被共和黨以媒體宣傳打壓,稱其誇大自己的戰績。因為現實生活中有太多信息干擾,許多人並不了解、也不想了解事實的全部,他們只想被直接告知答案,以至到頭來事件討論淪為 John 到底有無誇大戰績。

　　而時間滯後性問題亦深受影響。早期議程設置研究認為一般從報導開始到產生議程設置效果需要數週時間,但由於社交媒體的影響,現在幾無滯後性可言。人們不會在看到新聞數週後才將其發上網,議程設置效果幾乎是即時性的。

CH: 同時,人們亦處於一個多媒體時代。從用戶角度觀察,現在還能否分辨何種媒體在設置議題?從媒體角度來看,各種媒體關係是否互相交錯?例如網絡媒體與傳統媒體之間是否存在互設議題之影響?在您看來,這樣的環境對議程設置研究存在何種啟示?

WW: 傳統媒體具有兩大優勢:接觸新聞信息源,具備公眾可信度。假如英國發生了恐怖襲擊,我們不太可能通過部落格或 Facebook 去

獲取新聞。相反，傳統媒體如CNN或紐約時報卻將是主要信息來源。而非傳統媒體的優勢或許在於對議題的持續關注。例如新聞媒體可能僅提及某政府官員的醜聞，部落格卻可持續跟進直至有調查結果為止，而傳統媒體亦可能受此影響再進行持續報導。

　　主要啟示在於媒介信息將面臨雙重競爭：吸引注意力與擴大傳播管道。有些事件之所以成為主要議題，或許由於有人持續將其在媒體上看到的信息發佈上網，從而形成二次傳播；也有可能是媒體尚未關注到，但Facebook朋友間發佈形成話題。這種變化為未來研究帶來許多潛在方向：何種類型的人會更容易受朋友而非媒體之影響？人們更容易受國際化或本土化之議題影響？社交媒體議程設置之過程與傳統的議程設置是否相同？這種潛力是無限的。

CH: 新媒體環境使得一些議題，如性別、種族、宗教等，更加複雜。這類議題在新媒體環境中又存在何種社會或文化意義？

WW: 年齡將會成為未來議程設置研究中的重要因素。年輕人是千禧一代，相對於長者，他們是網絡專家。而毫無疑問，民主黨會比共和黨更擅長使用社交媒體，因而這些年輕人更可能傾向於民主黨。

CH: 提及新媒體，近來我讀了一篇名為"The Dynamics of Public Attention: Agenda-Setting Theory Meets Big Data"的文章，文中以大數據方法回答以往議程設置研究中面臨的兩大難題：其一，它使用時間序列分析回答了傳統議程設置研究中關於公眾議題與媒體議題何者為因、何者為果的問題；其二，它拓寬了議程設置之研究方法，由「自我報告」或「實驗法」拓展至「網絡數據分析」，從而減少了數據失真。簡而言之，公眾議題在社交媒體情境中愈發重要，而通過如大數據等方法亦使得分析愈發可行與方便。質言之，大數據將拓展而非取代傳統議程設置研究之邏輯與方法。在勾勒議題發展方向、「公眾－媒體」關係等方面大數據將頗有裨益，但在解釋其他關係上仍有所不足。因此，我認為就提供解釋而言，理論與邏輯仍不可或缺。

**　　另外，社交媒體雖提高了公眾議題對媒體議題之影響，但網民畢竟不是人口之全部，社交媒體之議題亦只能代表網絡公眾議**

題。您認為是否有必要區分媒體議題與網絡公眾議題對現實公眾議題之影響？

WW：大數據確實對研究者帶來了機遇與挑戰。目前大數據已方便用於記錄各項真實指標，然而在一些需要情境的領域，仍是稍顯不足。不過，大數據仍是為議程設置研究提供了額外的工具。

　　我們研究的優勢之一，在於議程設置理論具有極高的靈活性。因為議程設置的過程可以通過多種方式與數據來呈現。我比較擔憂的反而是研究範圍不斷擴張以至於脫離了最初的理論假設。

　　議程設置肯定也存在於社交媒體。一方面，我看到朋友發佈文章，而我信任他們因而無論內容為何，我都認定是重要的。因此，相較於傳統媒體，社交媒體在某些方面對我有更強的影響。但另一方面，他們發佈的文章可能大部份來自於傳統媒體。所以，我還是覺得研究者在未來擁有無限可能。

CH：作為議程設置領域的實證研究先驅，您認為未來這類研究空間如何？

WW：我認為議程設置研究仍會是一大重要領域。基於最初假設的研究仍在持續進行，而關於新領域的探索亦不曾間斷。在第一層議程設置 —— 顯著性研究減弱之際，第二層議程設置 —— 屬性研究已受關注。目前，第三層議程設置（包含網絡議題）業已興起。新興研究總會取代舊的領域，未來亦將如此。

　　究其不衰之根本，在於議程設置研究始終在探索一個重要命題：人對其所處之社會環境的感知過程。

CH：最後一個問題，作為享譽國際的學者，您教學足跡已逾40國，且著作等身。您是如何保持如此高的效率？在平衡學術服務與研究方面，是否有獨到見解？

WW：所有研究均源於自我探索。我每天都生活在自我探索中——媒體是如何影響我的、何種條件下媒體又無法影響到我等等。這種方式能幫我更邏輯化地思考任何生活經歷。

　　當然，良師益友亦必不可少。我的導師兼好友 Max McCombs 是我最敬重、學習最多的人。與優秀的學生共事亦讓我受益良多，他們讓我保持新鮮與創造性的思維方式。

　　最後，永不言棄。身為教授，我常常感受到來自各方的挫折：院長不理解你、期刊評論人員不明白你、學生抱怨你等等。因此，挫敗感很容易將你淹沒。但好在大眾傳播學畢竟不是腦科手術，雖然箇中原理同樣盤根錯節，但沒人會因為你出錯而死亡。

　　最理想的情況下，研究、教學與服務應相輔相成。仔細回想，這也確實是我的真實感觸。早年的我投身於研究，得以結識眾多學者，因而在新聞與大眾傳播教育學會（AEJMC）中得以當選主席。在此期間，我有機會到葡萄牙、阿根廷等各國演講。而這段經歷又增加了我到世界各地演講的機會，從而得以吸引優秀的學生。我努力培養他們，進而又促進我的研究與聲譽。

韋恩・旺塔著作選

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Academic Dialogue with Wayne Wanta

How to Re-Thrive?
Reconsideration of Classic Communication Theory in the New Media Environment

Wayne Wanta is a professor in the department of journalism at the University of Florida. He is a world-class communication scholar, who used to be the president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC) and twice represented AEJMC as a delegate to the World Journalism Education Congress. Meanwhile, he has lectured and delivered research presentations in more than 40 different countries.

Wanta has produced a prolific body of work, including around 200 research articles and papers and 8 books, mostly in the area of media effect, political communication, and public opinion research. More specifically, ever since he was a PhD student, Wanta has been attentive to the relationship between agenda setting and those same areas of study just listed. He has written more than 30 articles about agenda setting and launched numerous research and teaching programs on that topic. It is our honor to have such an expert to talk to us about agenda setting.

WW: Wayne Wanta
CH: Christine Huang

CH: What inspired you to first begin your agenda-setting research? To what extent do you agree that the basic assumption behind classic agenda-setting theory is linear communication and one-way information flow? And to what extent would you agree that agenda-setting theory is more like a limited effect-oriented theory, which developed as a response to doubts about strong effect-oriented theories. Media may not powerfully affect your attitude or behavior, but it can influence what you think about; this is the effect of accessibility.

WW: My initial interest in agenda setting was partly happenstance and partly my brain's logic. I worked for eight years in the newspaper industry as a page designer / copy desk chief. When I first heard the

idea that the mass media do not necessarily tell people what to think but rather what to think about, I thought, "Well, of course." This is what I did for a living—I told people what was important that deserved their attention. My newspaper career led me to newspapers in Texas, both Dallas and Austin. My first semester in the graduate program at the University of Texas, I was introduced to the newly hired department chair named Max McCombs. We immediately became very good friends.

It's been a long time since agenda setting was viewed as a one-way transferal model of media influence. Max likes to say that "there are many agendas." The agenda of concerns that people hold comes from many places: Interpersonal communication, real world experiences, and now social media. The agenda-setting process still happens—people become concerned with issues. It's just that the process has become much more complicated.

Yes, agenda setting emerged at a time when limited effects model was in vogue. But the agenda setting effect should not be minimized. There is an effect of the news media. But the effect is cognitive—social learning. Cognitive effects are important. They just aren't as powerful as attitudinal or behavior effects. In many cases, this cognitive effect is positive: People learn about important issues in society. Isn't that why people use the media, to learn? The effect is clearly not powerful, but it isn't minimal either. It should be considered a moderate effect.

CH: In one talk you mentioned about five branches of agenda setting (i.e., original hypothesis, source of media agenda, contingent conditions, policy agenda, and agendas of attributes). Can you elaborate here? Is it possible to theorize these five branches?

WW: The original agenda-setting hypothesis proposed a message transferal process. The media cover an issue. People see the coverage. People become concerned with the issue in the coverage. It was very simple. But not all people are affected to similar degrees. So, researchers examined the factors that strengthen or weaken the media-public relationship. They examined the beginnings of the process—how the media agenda is constructed, or influences on the media agenda. They examined the connection point between the media and public—factors dealing with the message transmitted by the media and the factors

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dealing with public acceptance of the message. Researchers called these factors "contingent conditions." Researchers examined the end of the process—do media coverage and public concern lead to action by public officials. Thus, do public officials take action on an issue if the media and public demonstrate concern? These studies so far looked at factors before the process begins, during the process, and after the process is complete. The fifth branch looked at the same process, but with a different type of agenda. Do people learn about attributes linked to objects in the news in the same way as they learn about issues through news coverage? This second level of agenda setting is certainly more complex. It proposes that media link attributes or characteristics to people, places or things. They give more attention to certain attributes over others. The public learns these patterns of coverage and links the attributes to the objects to a similar degree as the media.

Theorizing about agenda setting begins with the original hypothesis: that media coverage influences the priorities held by the public. The other branches of agenda setting are extensions of this hypothesis.

CH: You have conducted many studies to extend the scope of agenda-setting theory. Second-level agenda setting, which highlights the effect of attributes emphasized in coverage of media consumers' affective attitudes, in addition to some of your other research, even goes beyond the attitude domain and attempts to see the effect of agenda setting on behavioral change. To what extent do you think it helps to extend the theoretical knowledge of a classic theory? Following up on the previous question, to what extent would you agree that the effect of second-level agenda setting has evolved to attitudes or even behavioral formation or change? If this is the case, would you agree that second-level agenda setting has shifted back to strong effect-oriented theory (i.e., the effect of applicability)? Along this line of argument, to what extent do you think it (second-level agenda setting) still retains the original research intention of agenda-setting theory?

WW: Second level agenda setting has complicated matters. It is still based on the original hypothesis, and continues to propose an influence on the public's "agenda." It's just a different agenda. People have all

sorts of agendas. I have a sports agenda. I care deeply for the Green Bay Packers, a professional football team. I care about other teams, but these other teams rise and fall based on news coverage. For example, a player on another team may be arrested for domestic violence. I likely would lower that team on my agenda of favorite teams. I might think domestic violence is an important issue (first level agenda setting), but domestic violence is an attribute that is linked to the player and team (second level agenda setting). In this case, I not only have been influenced by the cognitive attributes (domestic violence) but also by affective attributes (negative attitudes). Second level thus shows both cognitive and affective influences. This is certainly stronger than the original agenda-setting hypothesis proposed.

But there is also research being conducted using the Internet to track public concern. This research often misses an important point. While the original hypothesis proposed a cognitive effect, public concerns through postings on the Internet take this one step further. People see news coverage in the media and become concerned with the issues being coverage (the original hypothesis). But some individuals become so concerned with news coverage that they are motivated into action. They do something: They post something on the Internet related to the issue. Thus, the effect is now behavioral. These postings are then seen by many other people.

An example: I live in Florida, a state with a long coastline on the Gulf of Mexico. A few years ago, there was a major oil spill in the Gulf. Three of my friends on Facebook almost immediately posted a link to a page "Boycott BP Oil." They had not seen the oil spill personally—they lived in Illinois, California and Oklahoma, none of which tough the Gulf. But their exposure to the news media motivated them to post a link on Facebook. When I saw this, I thought that I should be concerned with this issue as well. Thus, my friends influenced my issue agenda after they were influenced by the media agenda. It's almost like the two-step flow theory. Media coverage influences the agenda of opinion leaders who filter the messages to opinion followers.

CH: According to your studies, different issues may have different agenda-setting effects. Some, like immigration, taxes, and

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healthcare, have a stronger effect; while others like abortion may not. To what extent do you think different agenda-setting effects are due to the different nature of the issues? And, most importantly, is there any pattern that you find regarding the relationship between effects and issues?

WW: There are many factors impacting agenda setting. People are not robots who passively accept data that are imputed from a source. There are lots of variables here, which is why doing agenda-setting research is so very interesting. It would be pretty boring if agenda setting worked the same way no matter the circumstances. There would be nothing to research.

People have differing attention patterns. They also have different information processing systems. Some people are concerned with a very limited number of issues. We think this was the case with abortion. For some people, abortion is such an important issue that media coverage doesn't matter. Media coverage could disappear, or skyrocket. It doesn't matter to them because abortion is so important in their lives.

Under normal circumstances, people need to media to highlight issues. Very few people will personally experience a shooting at a school. But the news media report on the problems with guns. People would not know about the shooting without media coverage. But personal exposure could also play a part in agenda setting. I may go to a gas station to fill up my car and see that gas prices have greatly increased. This sensitizes me to the issue of high gasoline prices. I may raise this issue up my agenda regardless of media coverage. However, I then might see a news story about gasoline prices. This reinforces what I noted earlier, giving me a second exposure to this issue. So, personal exposure to an issue can interfere or reinforce the agenda-setting effect. So, you can see that different issues might have different effects for different people.

Research has identified some factors that show some consistent trends. Abstract issues, such as the U.S. budget deficit, for example, could have less of an agenda-setting effect than a concrete issue like crime. I have never seen $1 trillion, so the budget deficit is beyond my comprehension. However, I have seen bloody gun fights—though they were part of movies or television shows. I can picture a shooting

in my mind, so media coverage in this case may have a stronger impact.

CH: Another reason for different media effects may lie in contextual factors, like those you address in the comparative study you've done on the U.S. and Taiwan (i.e., variation of cultural factors and demographics may also affect the public agenda; therefore, do you consider contextualization or even localization a good way to revitalize classic communication theories?) If yes, what are your major suggestions/recommendations for such research?

WW: Localization and contextualization in news coverage helps people picture the issues in their heads, as Walter Lippmann noted nearly a century ago. This is hugely important, because if people can't picture an issue, they are not likely to understand its significance. A news story about water pollution may have an agenda-setting influence on some people. But if the story can be contextualized—how the water pollution will make drinking water in our homes unhealthy—it would have a bigger impact. People can picture polluted water coming out of a faucet. They might not be able to picture a polluted river without traveling to see polluted rivers.

There are certain other individual factors that impact our ability to picture the world in our heads. Notably, education level consistently has been found to play a role in agenda setting. Individuals with high education levels can understand the significance of news stories and are therefore are more susceptible to agenda-setting effects. I once proposed that agenda-setting research should be linked to the knowledge gap hypothesis. Oftentimes, researchers look at theories in isolation. But if highly educated individuals are most susceptible to the social learning that is agenda setting, wouldn't that mean that this would create an increased gap in knowledge about the important issues of the day between individuals with high and low education? And what would this mean for society, where only certain people know a lot about important issues?

CH: We now live in a digital era with diversified media platforms. What do you think is the greatest challenge and opportunity for agenda-setting theory?

WW: One challenge, I believe, is to remember the roots of agenda setting. Research that uses postings on the Internet to track public concern, as mentioned above, are examining a behavioral effect, not a cognitive effect proposed in the original hypothesis. This could change the dependent variable of agenda setting. Dave Weaver noted this at a recent conference when he said that these studies may be tracking "issue interest" and not "issue concern." Several years ago, I saw a story about a new problem at a local high school: Girls were chewing tobacco. I remember talking about this story the entire day. Obviously, I didn't think that girls chewing tobacco was the most important problem facing our country today. But I certainly was interested in this issue. The same could be happening with the Internet. After reading this story, I might have posted a link to it on Facebook. My friends would have "liked" or responded to the link. But the issue likely did not rise on people's agendas. There needs to be a clear differentiation between concern and interest.

CH: Taking time-lag (referring to how long an issue would become important to audiences after exposure in the news coverage) as an example, people nowadays have a short attention span and overloaded information. Do you think this will affect agenda setting in the new media environment? If yes, how?

WW: I think we are already seeing the impact of the Internet and social media. The amount of information that people have access to is intimidating. How do you tame this information overload? One way people are simplifying their lives is by looking for ways to reduce the amount of information they seek. This amount to people asking for the media to "tell" them what's important and not "show" them why. For example, in 2004, John Kerry, a war hero, ran for president against George W. Bush. Kerry had saved people's lives. But Republicans ran a commercial claiming he had exaggerated his war record. Many people did not want to know all of the facts. They just wanted to know if he had deserved his medals. The issue was a lot more complicated, but because people have many distractions in their lives, they only wanted to be told, which worked against Kerry.

The time lag question is also impacted. Early agenda-setting studies suggested several weeks of media coverage would be needed

before an agenda-setting effect could be detected. But with social media, the time lag is almost immediate. People are not likely to see something in the news media, and four weeks later post something about it on the Internet. No, they may read a news story and post something within a day or two. The effect could be found almost immediately.

CH: People are getting more used to a multi-media environment. From the perspective of media users, would it be possible to identify which kind of media is actually setting the agenda? And, from the perspective of the media, the relationships among media are often interwoven, i.e., traditional media and the online media set the agenda for each other and vice versa. What are the major implications of this for agenda-setting theory?

WW: Traditional media have two important assets: They have access to news and sources, and they have credibility with the public. If a terrorist attack happens in the U.K., we would unlikely turn to bloggers or Facebook for news. The traditional news media—CNN or the New York Times—would be our main sources for information. What non-traditional media are good at is their ability to keep issues on the agenda. A scandal in a governor's office might receive media coverage, but a blogger may continue to write about the issue until some sort of closure is reached. The media would need to continue covering the issue because of the attention from outside the newsroom.

The major implication is that media messages have both competition for attention and additional outlets for dissemination. Some issues rise on the public's agenda because some people continually post messages about issues they see in the media—multiple exposures to issues through two channels. Other issues rise because Facebook friends post things that the media are ignoring. This opens up huge new areas of research. What type of individual is affected more strongly by friends than the media? Are individuals more likely to be impacted by local issues or international? Does agenda setting through social media follow the same process as agenda setting through traditional media? The possibilities are endless.

CH: The new media environment also complicates issues like the one you've been concerned with—gender, race, and religion. What new social or cultural significance do these issues take on in the new media environment?

WW: Age will certainly be a factor in future agenda-setting research. Younger people—the "millennials"—are much more Internet savvy than older people. It is no surprise that the Democrats have been much better at using social media than Republicans. In turn, the millennials are much more likely to be Democrats.

CH: I read an article entitled "The Dynamics of Public Attention: Agenda-Setting Theory Meets Big Data." This article uses big data to deal with two major problems. First, it uses time-series analysis to tackle the limitations of traditional agenda-setting studies in terms of explaining the issue vectors, (i.e., traditional correlation analysis cannot discover the dynamic relationship between public and media agendas. Second, it extends the methodological boundary for investigating the public agenda using self-reports or experimental data to investigating it using recordable online data. This reduces the level of distortion. In brief, the concept "public agenda" becomes increasingly important in the context of social media, and it is much more accessible and analyzable by virtue of techniques for analyzing big data. In other words, big data means extension rather than replacement of the traditional research logic and method of agenda setting. It is useful for depicting the patterns of issue vectors as they trace the relationship between media and the public, but it cannot explain the variation of other relationships. Thus, big data is a useful tool for building up a map of information flow; but for further explanations, theoretical logic is still salient.

Social media provide evidence for the impact of public agenda on media agenda. More accurately speaking, however, social media represent an online public agenda because netizens are not representative of the entire population. Do you think it is necessary to investigate the influence of both media agenda and online public agenda (social media agenda) on the real-world public agenda?

WW: Big data offer researchers many opportunities and challenges. Big data are readily available and can track real world indicators. It is less successful in areas that need context. But it does provide an additional tool that can be incorporated in agenda-setting studies.

One of the strengths of our research is the incredible flexibility of the theory. The agenda-setting process can be examined in many ways, using all sorts of data. The worry is that research continues to expand while getting far afield from the original hypothesis.

Agenda setting definitely occurs with social media. Friends post articles that they find are interesting. My friends have high credibility with me. I trust them. Thus, when they post something, I trust them enough to think whatever they posted is important. Social media thus can have a stronger impact on me than traditional media in some cases. On the other hand, much of what my friends post comes from traditional media. As mentioned above, researchers have many possibilities for future investigation.

CH: Last but not least, as one of the pioneers of the empirical study of agenda-setting theory, what room do you believe there is for further research in this area?

WW: I think agenda-setting research will continue to be an important area. When research of the original hypothesis was running its course, researchers moved into other branches of discovery. When issue agenda setting was subsiding, researchers moved into second-level agenda setting. Now, there is a third level involving an agenda of networks. New areas of research have always replaced the old. There is no reason to believe that this will not be the case in the future.

Research continues because of the importance of the ultimate effect: the process of how people learn about their social environment.

CH: Last question—After lecturing in more than 40 countries and writing over 200 papers, what makes an internationally known scholar so productive? Do you have any tips on how to balance your academic service and research?

WW: All my research starts with an N of 1—me. Every study starts with me putting myself in the shoes of my respondents. How do the media affect me? Under what conditions do the media not influence me? This helps me think logically about whatever process I am examining.

I also benefited from a great mentor. Max McCombs was the perfect person to learn from. I think the world of him, and we remain great friends.

I also continue to benefit from working with great students. They keep me thinking in new and creative ways.

Finally, it's important to never give up. Professors get discouragement from all sorts of sources: Deans don't understand what you do; Journal reviewers often don't understand the significance of your work; Students sometimes complain because that is the nature of being a student. It is easy to get frustrated. But mass communication is not like brain surgery. There are many nodes and synapses, but no one dies if you make an error.

Ideally, research, teaching and service should all work together. Looking back, I think that was the case with me. In my early years, I did a lot of research that got me noticed by colleagues. That helped me get elected president of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. While serving as president, I was invited to speak internationally in places like Portugal and Argentina. This led to more opportunities to speak internationally, which helped attract excellent students. I had success teaching these students, which helped with my research and increased my international reputation.

Selected Works by Wayne Wanta

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for Wayne Wanta's selected works.