

Measuring the Effects of Comedy News Programming: An Agenda Setting Experiment

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Comedy Central's hit "fake news" program *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (TDS) has captivated popular, critical, and scholarly attention over the past several years. The program's fans proclaim the titular host the most trusted name in news (Kakutani, 2008), while its critics blast the program for cheap cynicism (Hart & Hartelius, 2007). The program is reflective of a broader movement in mass media which has moved away from traditional hard news sources towards humorous, entertainment driven content like *The Colbert Report*, *The Onion*, and *Saturday Night Live*. In an era of decline for newspapers and magazines, late night comics have become a primary source for political commentary and analysis (Hmielowski, Holbert & Lee, 2011).

The apparent trend towards comedic news sources, largely overlooked in academic scholarship, raises serious questions for the study of mass communication which examines the delivery of messages to the public through film, advertising, news, entertainment television, talk shows, and the Internet. These questions are nowhere more pressing than the field of agenda setting theory. Briefly reviewed here, agenda setting postulates that people will consider most important those issues that the media discusses most frequently and most intensely (McCombs, 2005). It also predicts that people are very likely to adopt the media's characterizations of particular issues, people, or organizations (McCombs, 2005). Therefore, as the theory's originator, Maxwell McCombs (1993) explained, "Agenda setting is considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us what to think about. The news also tells us how to think about it." Together these two postulates comprise the agenda setting hypothesis. Agenda

setting is further explicated in the literature review, but this terminology was included here to provide a mutual framework for this investigation.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to test agenda setting theory. Specifically, this study seeks to compare the relative effectiveness of different types of media content (watching *The Daily Show (TDS)*, hard news, or no video) in setting the public agenda. As a result, the dependent variable of interest is the agenda setting effect of a particular video clip—thus this project seeks to learn how the type of media content impacts the dependent variable, agenda setting, if it does at all. I examined the agenda setting effect in relation to four independent variables: the type of media content viewed by the participant (either *TDS* or *ABC News*), participants' perception of the credibility of the videos' source (using the Source Credibility Scale), media trust (using the news consumption scale), and participants' attentiveness to the video clip (using the Media Attentiveness Scale).

Although media scholars have dissected, supported, and expanded agenda setting theory for more than forty years, exactly how agenda setting works and in what context it works is still understood poorly. The rise of comedy news like TDS forces a reexamination of the theory to determine how, why, and how much comedic news sets the media agenda like hard news, if it does at all. The questions of how, why, and to what degree media coverage influences public perception of political issues are of paramount importance to the functioning of a democratic society. McCombs (2005) argued that agenda setting theory provokes important questions for politicians, businesses, education and even religious organizations. How the public perceives and

thinks about all these institutions relies, at least in part, on the media agenda. Therefore, the ubiquity of media and media consumption implies that the changes in attitudes and behavior predicted by agenda setting theory hold profound consequences for virtually every social institution in society.

Moreover, understanding how comedic or soft news like *The Daily Show* is especially important in the current media environment. For example, Rasmussen Reports (2013) found that only 6% of Americans rate news media as “very trustworthy.” At the same time that trust in traditional media sources is declining, popularity and trust in comedy news is rising. A slew of newspapers and magazines have commented on TDS host Jon Stewart’s ascendancy, labeling him America’s most trusted name in news. *People* magazine even called him the most influential man of 2010. These accolades suggest that despite *The Daily Show*’s comedic tenor, it may wield as much or more power over the public agenda than traditional news sources.

Comedic News and Questions About Agenda Setting Theory

If TDS and programs like it do influence the public agenda, it begs serious questions of agenda setting theory. This study adds to communication literature by investigating several questions concerning the relationship between agenda setting effects and comedy news programming.

First, this study explores the applicability of agenda setting theory to comedy news programming. Although previous literature suggests that fictional programming like television dramas and movies can exhibit agenda setting effects (Holbert, Pillion, Tschida, Armfield, Kinder, Cherry & Daulton, 2003), previous scholarship has ignored

satirical news programs like TDS and Saturday Night Live's "Weekend Update" in terms of agenda setting. This study attempts to extend agenda setting theory to comedy news, a previously unexamined content area.

Second, this study examines agenda setting in the context of videos on the Internet. Several previous studies have explored the agenda setting effects of television news (Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Iyengar, Peters & Kinder, 1982). Others have studied agenda setting in web-based news articles and blogs (Sweetser, Golan & Wanta, 2008; Ragas & Kioussis, 2005). However, to date, no studies have explicitly examined web-based video clips as a source of agenda setting effects. Given the massive expansion of video consumption on the Internet over the past several years, this represents a significant gap in current understanding of agenda setting theory. This investigation attempted to support the agenda setting hypothesis, the idea that the media informs the public which issues are most important, in the previously unexamined medium of web-based video.

Third, this study facilitates a comparison of agenda setting effects for comedic and traditional news programming. Relatively few studies have attempted to compare the agenda setting power of different types of media, leaving the relative impact of video, text, and radio up for debate. Additionally, only one study (Kowalewski, 2011) explicitly compared comedic and hard news content about the same issue. This investigation examined the relationship between the presentation style of news content with that content's agenda setting effects.

Fourth, this investigation explores the cognitive mechanisms underlying agenda

setting effects. Specifically, it examines the role of two independent variables that may contribute to agenda setting: source credibility and elaboration likelihood. Here, source credibility tested how competent, trustworthy, and the general sense of goodwill present in TDS and hard news video clips (McCroskey & Tevan, 2013). Due to the dearth of comparative agenda setting studies, source credibility is unexplored as a predictor of agenda setting effects. This study tested whether the relative credibility of a particular source influences its agenda setting power.

Elaboration likelihood explains that people process information through two different routes or pathways. When individuals care about an issue, they pay close attention to content and process it through the central route. When they are less interested, they pay less attention and process the information through the peripheral route (Kahneman, 2013). Existing research disagrees about which route is responsible for agenda setting effects, but a recent study by Bulkow, Urban, & Schweiber (2013) suggests that both may play a role. This project expands the current understanding of the processes underlying agenda setting theory by testing directly the elaboration likelihood and agenda setting effect of two different types of media content.

Finally, the study explores the effect of time on the agenda setting influence of a particular piece of media content. Many previous agenda setting studies have examined aggregate news coverage against polling data (Funkhouser, 1973; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), making participant-level time-lagged comparisons impossible. More recent experimental designs have focused on instantaneous changes in individuals' agendas (Iyengar et al., 1982; Kowalewski, 2011). As a result, the durability of agenda setting influences remains unclear. This study examined the lasting effects of media content

over the period of one week. The question is important because if agenda setting effects are limited to only a few hours it is unlikely that the theory can explain long-term shifts in public attitudes and opinions. The study also explored whether differences in source credibility and attentiveness influence the durability of effects.

Outline of Chapters

The following thesis examines how and why agenda setting effects occur in five sections. Chapter two discusses the existing scholarly understanding of comedy news programming, agenda setting theory and dual processing models of information attainment that are relevant to agenda setting theory. I isolate a series of gaps in the literature relating to the applicability of agenda setting theory to new media content and the theory's underlying cognitive processes. The section also identifies a series of specific hypotheses and research questions.

The third chapter explicates this study's methodological approach the problems posed above. It provides a justification for the positivist, quantitative approach to agenda setting research and details the parameters of the investigation. I discuss the study's participants, its quasi-experimental survey design and the statistical tests required to answer the challenge of each hypothesis.

The fourth chapter provides a summary of the results of each statistical test. It included a brief report on the critical values, confidence intervals and margins of error each statistic as appropriate.

In the fifth chapter, I discuss the implications of the results section. The section includes a thorough examination of the study's results in two main areas: the

implications for agenda setting theory and the possible consequences of the hypotheses for individuals and organizations hoping to set the public agenda.

The sixth and final chapter provides a conclusive summary of this investigation, including a brief review of the study's importance for agenda setting theory in terms of the cognitive processes that explain the theory's effects and its applicability to new forms of media. The section also includes a comprehensive discussion of this study's limitations and a call for further research on the questions generated by the study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following literature review, three major sections are presented. First, I examine the theoretical framework guiding this analysis, agenda setting theory. Here, I define and explain the theory. Agenda setting scholarship is also reviewed. Next, I review previous scholarly examinations of soft news. Finally, I discuss elaboration likelihood, humor, and source credibility in relation to their separate and possible combined effects on agenda setting.

Hypotheses and research questions are included within the literature review to illustrate the ways in which this study builds upon and adds to communication literature. However, for clarity purposes they are also presented together in order at the conclusion of this chapter.

Agenda Setting Theory

Since its inception with McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study, agenda setting has received substantial attention from scholars in the communication studies, media, mass communication, public relations, and political communication fields (Funkhouser, 1973; Iyengar et al., 1982; Kiouisis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008; Ragas, 2012). Tai's (2009) citation analysis of agenda setting papers revealed that the subject remains a vigorous and productive area of study and continues to expand into new intellectual territory. However, many important questions about the cognitive mechanisms responsible for agenda setting and the relative agenda setting power of different types of media remain open.

Below, I outline the fundamental tenets of agenda setting theory including the five stages and three levels. Throughout this section, I discuss applications of the theory to a variety of mass communication contexts. Next, the relationship between agenda setting, framing, and priming is briefly reviewed for a well-rounded understanding of agenda setting. Finally, this section concludes with a review of previous agenda setting scholarship.

An Outline of Agenda Setting Theory. Agenda setting theory seeks to explain the relationships between three variables: the issues the media chooses to cover (the media agenda), the issues the public cares about (the public agenda), and the issues that policymakers care about (the policy agenda) (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The original hypothesis of agenda setting theory predicts that the media transfers issues to the public agenda, meaning that *issues receiving the most media coverage will consequently receive the greatest attention from the public* (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Thus, heightened media coverage of a political issue like immigration should be associated with the public rating immigration as a more important policy issue when compared to other issues covered less. Equally, heightened media coverage of a political issue like veteran's benefits should also be associated with the public rating veteran's benefits as a more important policy issue when compared to other issues covered less.

Although agenda setting theory traces its routes to journalist Walter Lippman's (1922) suggestion that the media influences public opinion, credit for the formalized theory goes to mass communication theorists Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw. McCombs and Shaw (1972) first studied how the media influences public opinion in the 1970s. They examined media coverage of presidential candidates in the 1968

presidential election demonstrated. They hoped to learn how media coverage of particular issues related to the public's perception of the importance of those issues. They interviewed residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina about the presidential race and compared the results with newspaper stories published or broadcast in the *Durham Morning Herald*, *Durham Sun*, *Raleigh News and Observer*, *Raleigh Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the NBC and CBS evening news broadcasts (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The study employed basic content analysis, determining that an issue received significant media attention according the length of stories about the issue and their presence on the front page or at the beginning of a televised broadcast.

They reported that the issues the public rated as the most important in the campaign were also the issues covered most heavily by the media. Results supported what would become the *basic agenda setting hypothesis*: the public rates issues discussed more often in the news as more important than issues that were covered less frequently (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This initial examination sparked significant academic interest in agenda setting. Early follow-up studies by Funkhouser (1973) and Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982) confirmed the agenda setting hypothesis, and now more than 400 studies have been published on the topic. To date, agenda setting research centers around five overlapping areas of study.

Agenda Setting: Five Stages and Three Levels. McCombs (2005) has traced the growth and evolution of the theory through five overlapping stages or areas of study including: a) basic agenda-setting effects (i.e. the transfer of issue salience from the media to the public), b) attribute agenda setting (i.e., the transfer of the attributes of certain issues from the media to the public), c) the psychology of agenda setting (i.e.

how agenda setting occurs in the minds of media consumers), d) the sources of the media agenda (i.e., how the media decides what issues to cover and how to cover them), and finally, e) and the consequences of agenda setting (i.e., the results of agenda setting effects on public opinion and policy). The first two stages, basic effects and attribute agenda setting, have also been characterized as first and second-level agenda setting.

In addition to these five stages, researchers also define agenda setting by three distinct agenda setting levels (Guo, 2012). The first level, issue salience, explains that the public accepts as important those issues that win the most prominence in the media. During the first level, the salience of an issue is transferred from the media to the public – this the public becomes aware of a particular topic or concern (McCombs, 2005). The second level, attribute salience, predicts that the public will adopt not only the salience of the issue but also the attributes forwarded by the media concerning the issue (McCombs, 2005). In other words, while the first level approaches *which* issues the media covers, the second level deals with *how* issues are portrayed (Weaver, 2007). Put succinctly by McCombs (1993), “Agenda setting is considerably more than the classical assertion that the news tells us what to think about. The news also tells us how to think about it (the issue)” (p. 62).

Researchers understand the second level of agenda setting in conjunction with two similar concepts: priming and framing. While agenda setting refers to the relationship between issues the media emphasizes and issues the public identifies as important, priming refers to “changes in the standards people use to make political evaluations” (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987, p. 63). According to priming theories, people use the news to establish issues as standards for evaluating governments and political

leaders (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Iyengar and Kinder (1987) argued that priming is an extension of agenda setting theory because they share a common theoretical foundation in their theories of information processing. *Framing* is also similar to the second level of agenda setting. Although definitions vary, the most widely accepted iterations of framing theories assume that how an issue is characterized in the news may influence how people understand the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). As McCombs (1997) put it, “framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed” (p. 3). Thus, in terms of agenda setting, the characterization or framing of a media issue impacts how the public comes to think about a particular issue.

Over the years, a *third level* of agenda setting was developed. Guo, Vu, and McCombs (2012) recently expanded agenda setting theory to a third level called the “network agenda setting model.” This model suggests that the media can “bundle sets of objects or attributes and makes these bundles of elements salient in the public’s mind simultaneously” (p. 51). Guo (2012) introduced the application of social network analysis to agenda setting research. Social network analysis is “a set of research procedures for mapping and measuring the relations and flows” (Guo, 2012, p. 616). For example, the technique allows researchers to locate relationships between issues covered in the news even when those issues appear unconnected.

Analysis of the intersection of social network theory and agenda setting is promising because it may help researchers understand the interplay of various concepts and ideas in the news. For example, “Iraq WMD,” “9/11,” and “Sadaam Hussein” may frequently appear in a bundle in a news program. Guo’s (2012) theory suggests that

bundles like this may cause the public to form associations between unrelated concepts. However, the third-level is new, relatively unexplored, and beyond the scope of the inquiry presented here. Instead, this study focused on enhancing understanding of the first two levels of agenda setting theory by examining the relationship between different types of media content (two clips of TDS compared to two clips from ABC News) and the ability of that content to restructure the public's agenda.

Specifically, this study hopes to extend the first and second levels of agenda setting theory in three ways. First, it enhanced our understanding of the cognitive mechanisms responsible for first and second-level effects. Second, it explored how different ways of presenting information contribute to differences in the magnitude of agenda setting effects. Finally, this investigation also measures an agenda setting impact on these two specific topics, immigration or veteran's benefits, over one week's time.

Previous Agenda Setting Literature

Below, I review several areas of research in which agenda setting theory has shed light on the interaction between media consumption and shifts in attitude, including: a) Agenda setting and politics; b) agenda setting in political campaigns; c) agenda setting outside the United States; d) agenda setting and general political issues; e) intermedia effects of agenda setting; f) agenda setting in corporate communications; g) agenda setting in entertainment; and finally, h) agenda setting in internet age.

Researchers have applied agenda setting theory to a surprising variety of media contexts (Kiousis et al., 2006; Sheafer & Weimann, 2005; Sweetser, Golan, & Wanta, 2008). In fact, the bulk of the studies tracked changes in public opinion as measured by

polling data or researcher surveys in comparison to content analyses of television news and newspaper articles (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Funkhouser, 1973; Williams & Larsen, 1977; Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982). Although election politics has enjoyed the plurality of research attention, other scholars have examined agenda setting effects in international politics (Moreno, Kiouisis, & Humanes, 2009; Shehata, 2010), agenda setting between media producers (Ragas & Kiouisis, 2010; Meraz, 2011), in corporate elections (Ragas, 2012), and even in entertainment media (Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Moy, Xenos, & Hess, 2005). The follow section explores seven areas of agenda setting research: political campaigns in the United States, political campaigns outside the United States, general public opinion on policy issues, intermedia effects, corporate communications, entertainment, and the Internet.

Agenda Setting and Politics. Much of the work exploring agenda setting has focused on the interaction between news coverage of political issues and public opinion about those issues (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Many of these studies have focused on changes during major election cycles, a sensible strategy since polling data during campaigns is more widely available and since news coverage often changes during the height of a campaign to focus issues pressed by the candidates (Golan, Kiouisis, & McDaniel, 2007; Kiouisis et al., 2006). However, some studies have also examined agenda-setting effects in the absence of election cycles (Funkhouser, 1973; Iyengar et al., 1982). Exploring agenda setting in politics is important because the theory argues that the media exert far more influence over policymaking than might be expected.

Agenda Setting in Political Campaigns. Studies of agenda setting effects during campaigns are many and varied. McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study focused on

agenda setting in the presidential election, and many of the studies that followed also examined media effects in the setting of elections. For example, Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer (2006) evaluated the agenda setting effects of candidate news releases during the 2002 Florida gubernatorial election. The study incorporated campaign press releases, newspaper articles, and results from a statewide public opinion survey. It demonstrated statistically significant agenda-setting effects for campaign communications (Kiousis et al., 2006). Thus, these results supported the basic agenda setting hypothesis while also establishing that political candidates are capable of building the media agenda.

Additionally, Dunn (2005) discovered agenda setting effects in the 2005 Virginia gubernatorial election, but showed that the candidates had different agenda setting abilities in different newspapers. This suggested that different media institutions are unequal in both their agenda setting power and the way they select their agendas. This study further explored the concept of unequal agenda setting power across media institutions by comparing effects between two clips of TDS and two clips from the hard news.

Further, in a study of survey and content analysis data, Wu and Coleman (2009) found that second-level candidate attributes exerted more agenda-setting influence on voters than did issue salience. This indicates that perception of candidates' traits had a greater impact on voting intention than candidates' stances on issues. They also suggest that negative information has more power to set the public agenda. These results imply that different techniques of providing the same information result in differences in agenda setting. It is likely that this current investigation will confirm these results, but

will build on agenda setting knowledge by comparing the ways in which the hard news and TDS do or do not set the agenda. Thus, this study enhanced understanding of how different methods of broadcasting may result in different agenda setting effects.

Moreover, Golan, Kioussis, and McDaniel (2007) also applied agenda setting theory to the study of political advertisements from the 2004 presidential campaign. The study compared public opinion polling data with issue salience in political ads and television news stories. Although the data supported first-level agenda setting between news broadcasts and public opinion, results indicated only limited support for first-level agenda setting from political advertisements. Specifically, ads from the Bush campaign had no statistically significant relationship with the public agenda while ads from the Kerry campaign met only a reduced level of significance (Golan et al., 2007). Again, these results demonstrate that different forms of media result in different agenda setting effects. Given previous research, it is likely that *TDS* and the hard news clips will set the agenda in different ways, if they do at all.

Finally, Boydston, Glazier, and Pietryka (2013) also studied how presidential candidates attempt to manipulate and control the public agenda in debates. They found that candidates attempt to focus the debate on strategically valuable issues, but that this technique is limited by the salience of certain topics to the public. For example, a candidate cannot spend the entire debate focused on immigration policy if the public already cares more about unemployment (Boydston et al., 2013). The study thus helped to confirm that agenda setting does not occur in a vacuum; that is, actors hoping to influence the public agenda are limited by real-world circumstances and other media producers.

Agenda Setting Outside the United States. Agenda effects are not limited to the United States, suggesting that studies of agenda setting in the United States may be generalizable around the world. Several examples of this reality exist. First, Sheafer and Weimann's (2006) extensive study of agenda setting across four Israeli elections found strong support for the agenda-setting hypothesis in Israel. The Israeli public, it seems, behaves similarly to the American public in the context of media coverage of elections. Second, Moreno, Kiouisis, and Humanes (2009) found evidence of first and second level agenda setting between candidates in the 2004 elections in Spain. The unsurprising finding against suggested that agenda setting is not a peculiarity of the American media or public.

Finally, Shehata (2010) examined agenda-setting effects in the 2006 Swedish National Election campaign by building upon a panel survey. The study found agenda-setting effects, and revealed that attention to political news had a stronger impact on people with less political interest compared to those who were highly interested in politics. The transferability of agenda setting theory to media ecosystems outside the United States suggest that the effects are innate to media consumption and not the product of peculiarities of U.S. media consumers or producers (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

Agenda Setting and General Political Issues. Over the same period of time many studies have supported the agenda setting hypothesis outside the context of election news. Funkhouser (1973) compared six years of results from the Gallup public opinion survey with detailed content analysis of articles published in major news magazines over the same time period. His data demonstrated a strong relationship

between the issues most important to the public and the issues covered most extensively by the press. Thus, according to agenda setting, the media influence what political issues the public thinks about and how they think about them. Next, Williams and Larsen (1977) also observed agenda setting effects in a small Illinois town in a study designed to avoid the influence of election politics, suggesting that the theory is supported even in the absence of increased political coverage. This conclusion is reasonable because people consume media information both during and between elections.

Finally, Iyengar et al. (1982) expanded this line of research with an experimental study. They manipulated television news coverage to emphasize certain issues and downplay others. Over the course of the study, participants rated the issues emphasized in the edited news broadcasts as more important than other issues. These three studies are important because they establish that the transfer of issue and attribute salience from the media to the public occurs constantly, not just during election season. This implies that it is likely that the media set the agenda regarding other important, possibly non-political, issues throughout the year.

Intermedia Effects of Agenda Setting. Agenda setting effects also appear in studies of the media itself. Intermedia agenda setting refers to the ability of some media outlets to set or at least influence the agendas of their competitors. Thus, one media outlet has the power to influence what another covers and even deems to be important. This is well supported by a litany of studies. First, Sweetser, Golan, and Wanta (2008) found agenda setting effects between political candidates' blogs and the mainstream media, but did not find evidence of relationship between campaign advertisements and

the media agenda. The study's cross-lag analysis indicated that the media set the agenda of the blogs (Sweetser et al., 2008). In other words, large and popular media outlets help to determine the coverage of smaller, less established outlets.

Further, Ragas and Kiouisis (2010) tested for intermedia agenda setting among expressly partisan organizations during the 2008 presidential election. They found that advertisements produced in contests by amateur political enthusiasts were strongly related on the first and second levels of agenda setting to the content published by left-leaning bloggers. The bloggers responded to the media output of amateur videographers by adopting their agendas. Similarly, Meraz (2011) studied the interplay of elite traditional news entities and political blogs across three issues in 2007. Her data suggest that traditional media do not set blogs' agendas, and point to a dilution of traditional media's agenda-setting power. This implies that an increasingly Internet-driven media may see reduced agenda setting power. Finally, Lim (2011) studied intermedia agenda setting among major news websites in Korea. The findings supported limited agenda setting between major news websites and wire services. Lim's study has practical significance because it extends intermedia agenda setting beyond the boundaries of the American media.

Ultimately, the existence of intermedia agenda setting effects implies inequality between media producers. Some newspapers, magazines, and television stations exhibit greater agenda setting power than others and even influence the coverage decisions of their rivals.

Agenda Setting in Corporate Communications. In addition to the news

media, corporate communications appear to exhibit agenda setting power. For example, Ragas (2012) studied corporate information during proxy elections and found strong intercandidate issue and stakeholder agenda setting, expanding agenda setting theory from the political setting and into the world of business. The study demonstrates that agenda setting is not limited to traditional news media, but applies to other forms of mass communication. Finally, Kim and Kiouisis (2012) also demonstrated that corporate blogs could influence study participants' perceptions of the corporation, implying that even non-traditional media sources exhibit agenda setting power.

Again, application of agenda setting theory to the corporate setting reveals that different forms of media may exhibit different effects. This investigation hopes to expand agenda setting theory into the realm of comedy news like the *TDS*.

Agenda Setting and Entertainment. Several recent studies suggest that agenda-setting effects are not limited to news coverage, but also apply to entertainment across a variety of media. Holbert et al. (2003) found priming effects among viewers of the popular network drama *The West Wing*. Viewers of the program, which centered on the administration of fictional President Josiah Bartlett, were generally more likely to perceive Presidents Clinton and George W. Bush more positively. In other words, the positive attributes associated with the presidency of Josiah Bartlett transferred to real life political figures. Further, Moy, et al. (2005) also found support for priming effects of late night comedy and other “infotainment” television programs. Their data revealed that watching late night comedy programming was likely to influence voters' perceptions of candidates. Specifically, viewers of comedy programming were more likely to associate George W. Bush with character traits depicted on *The Late Show with*

David Letterman (Moy et al., 2005).

Given the close relationship between agenda setting and priming discussed above, this evidence previous research supports the theory that entertainment sources exhibit agenda setting effects. Holbrook and Hill (2005) made that argument explicitly in a study of viewers of crime dramas on television. They argued that construct accessibility (the accessibility of an idea in a person's mind), the mechanism most researchers suspect is responsible for the agenda setting effect, should apply equally to entertainment as it does to news coverage. They found that viewing crime dramas like *Law and Order* increased the issue salience of crime and even appeared to affect viewers' ratings of the President (Holbrook & Hill, 2005). This is significant because it suggests that if pure entertainment programs cause agenda setting effects, then entertainment news programs like *TDS* ought to do so as well. Indeed, given the gateway explanation for agenda setting effects discussed above, soft news programming like *TDS* may be more powerful in setting the public agenda than hard news.

Despite mounting and significant evidence that entertainment programming produces agenda setting effects in viewers, to date no studies to date have compared entertainment programs to hard news in terms of their influence on the public agenda. Although agenda setting certainly occurs through each type of program, it remains unclear whether one is more powerful than the other. The lack of information concerning raises the first hypothesis:

H1A: Participants who view a short clip from The Daily Show about immigration will rate immigration as more important than people who view

no clip.

H1_B: Participants who view a short mainstream news clip about immigration will rate immigration as a more important issue than people who view no clip.

The first two hypotheses function as a test of the strength of TDS in setting the public agenda. If the data support these hypotheses, it suggests that something about the comedic nature of the program may contribute to its added agenda setting power.

Agenda Setting in the Internet Age. Early agenda setting research focused on the most popular media sources of the time: broadcast television news, newspapers, and news magazines (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Funkhouser, 1973; Iyengar et al., 1982). However, the Internet has since revolutionized mass communications, raising important questions for agenda setting research. Strong evidence suggests that online news consumption differs from traditional news consumption in a variety of important ways. For example, Adler (2012) noted that Internet users participate in the creation and dissemination of news online by blogging, creating videos, and sharing links. Additionally, web users “graze a vast array of news outlets” instead of relying on a handful of traditional media sources (Adler, 2012). Several studies have successfully extended agenda setting theory to Internet media. Many studies have explored intermedia agenda-setting over the Internet, often with mixed results (see Fremlin, 2008; Ragas & Kioussis, 2010; Lim, 2011; Meraz, 2011).

Even fewer studies have examined the agenda-setting effects Internet media on audiences, an important area of research because so much media consumption occurs over the Internet. Recognizing shifting patterns of media consumption among younger people, Coleman and McCombs (2007) studied age-related differences in agenda

setting. They found that even though younger participants relied less on traditional media and more on the Internet, those participants' agendas were still highly correlated with the media agenda. This suggests that agenda setting effects will persist even as more and more media moves to the web.

Similarly, Martin (2009) found agenda setting effects for online newspaper articles. Kim and Kiouisis (2012) showed agenda setting effects for readers of a fictitious corporate blog, and Bulkow et al. (2013) also demonstrated agenda-setting influence of online news sources. These findings were consistent with McComb's (2005) observation that, contrary to expectations, the Internet news consumption appears to be more homogenized than newspaper readership or television news consumption.

Despite the evidence extending agenda setting theory to the Internet, however, some evidence suggests that online news consumption differs substantially from traditional media consumption. For example, Conway and Patterson (2008) reported that online newsreaders were less able to recall information than television viewers and exhibited fewer agenda setting impacts than television viewers. It may be that agenda setting effects are present for online media, but are less pronounced than in traditional media. If so, it might suggest that agenda setting effects will diminish as more and more media consumption moves online. Alternatively, agenda setting effects may vary according to the type of online media.

Surprisingly, all the studies of online agenda setting referenced above dealt with online consumption of text-based news stories. Literally half of all Internet traffic in

North America goes to online video sites Netflix and YouTube (Holpuch, 2013). Although much of this video consumption falls under the heading of entertainment, YouTube has also become an important news source. Users upload more than 7,000 hours of news-related content to the site every day, and the site receives a billion unique visitors each month (Koetsier, 2012). The non-profit group Invisible Children's video "Kony2012" became a web sensation, surpassing 70 million views in only five days (Grandoni, 2012). The focus on text content represents a major shortcoming in agenda setting studies because video and audio consumption make up a significant portion of Internet users' media diet.

Additionally, television news broadcasts are not comparable with Internet video news consumption because users have the ability to pick and choose which video clips to watch online. The differences between online video viewing and other forms of media consumption demand additional agenda setting research. Specifically, scholarship must determine whether and to what extent web-based video content exhibits agenda setting effects. This study helps to fill that gap by extending agenda setting theory to web-based video and comparing two different types of video. Thus, the third and fourth hypotheses:

H2A: Participants who view a short clip from The Daily Show about veteran's benefits will rate veteran's benefits as more important than people who view no clip.

H2B: Participants who view a short mainstream news clip about veteran's benefits will rate veteran's benefits as more important than people who view no

clip.

If the data support the third and fourth hypotheses, it would help to establish the applicability of agenda setting theory to web-based video clips.

Previous Scholarly Examinations of Soft News

Although the host of Comedy Central's late night hit program *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* insists that he produces "fake news," academic research reveals that the program produces real effects. For example, mounting evidence suggests that "soft news" programs like *The Daily Show*, *The Tonight Show*, and *The Colbert Report* play an important role as news sources for the general public (Brewer & Cao, 2006; Feldman, Leiserowitz, & Maibach, 2011; McBeth & Clemons, 2011). However, some contradictory evidence argues that viewers are likely to distinguish between soft and hard news (Prior, 2003) and gain less information from soft news than from hard news (Baumgartner & Morris, 2011).

Previous studies of soft news programs like TDS generally posed one of two questions: a) do viewers gain information from watching soft news programs and b) do soft news programs influence the attitudes of their viewers? Each of these questions is subject to debate, and each is important to agenda setting research. Whether soft news programs transfer information to viewers is central to agenda setting because the theory relies on the transfer of issue salience from the media to the public. If viewers of *TDS* gain little or no information from watching the program, it would suggest that agenda setting effects for the program are either non-existent or occur entirely subconsciously. Attitude change also lies at the heart of agenda setting theory. If viewer attitudes are unaffected by watching *TDS*, it suggests any agenda setting effect would be

undetectable. If viewers' attitudes are dramatically affected, however, it would suggest that *TDS* demonstrated a strong agenda setting effect.

Below, I review previous research that has also examined soft news. Specifically, three major areas are covered: a) Soft news and viewer information; b) soft news and viewer attitudes and behaviors; and finally, c) soft news and political beliefs.

Soft News and Viewer Information. The question of whether *TDS* and similar programs provide useful information has multiple answers. This inquiry is important because more than one fifth of Americans ages 18-29 cited alternative news programs like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* among their primary sources of political information (McKain, 2005).

Additionally, some research indicates that viewers of soft news and comedy programs are more informed than others (Brewer & Cao, 2006), while others suggest that soft news fares no better than other programming (Baumgartner & Morris, 2011).

Despite Stewart's insistence that *The Daily Show* is "fake news," many viewers of the program appear to gain real information from watching it (Brewer & Cao, 2006). Indeed, viewers of *TDS* are often more informed about political candidates backgrounds and policy positions than people who read newspapers or watch other television news sources. Similarly, Brewer and Cao (2006) asked respondents to identify where they first saw a political candidate on television. Although many participants were unable to remember where they first encountered a political figure, soft news ranked second only to Sunday morning talk shows (Brewer & Cao, 2006). These findings may be surprising at first glance, but a deeper look reveals that *TDS* frequently provides in-depth coverage

on pressing national issues even before those issues gain attention from hard news sources. For example, Bennett (2007) contended that *TDS* began covering the insurgency in Iraq long before the mainstream media picked up the story. Baym (2007) likewise argued that *TDS* program broke the CIA leak story that ultimately implicated Vice Presidential aid Scooter Libby.

Recent research suggests that both hard and soft news may enhance audience understanding of political issues, but that audiences interact with and appreciate diverse types of news in different ways. McBeth and Clemons (2011) attempted to assess whether the “fake news” programs like *TDS* and *The Colbert Report (TCR)* are, in fact, more real than the “real news.” They analyzed several controversies from the 2008 Presidential campaign cycle, as covered in the mainstream press and on *TDS* and *TCR*. Undergraduate students watched three clips from *ABC news*, *TCR*, and *TDS* covering Jeremiah Wright and Obama’s response speech. Results revealed that while the students seemed to learn more and gain more information from the *ABC news* clip, they felt that *TDS* better portrayed the complexities of race. Interestingly, moderates seemed more appreciative of *TDS* and *TCR* than either liberals or conservatives (McBeth & Clemons, 2011).

Although *TDS* has been lauded as encouraging political engagement in its young audience, Baumgartner and Morris (2011) were more skeptical. They conducted a large survey of American undergraduate students (n=3,577) about their political knowledge and engagement and their viewing habits concerning *The Daily Show*. The researchers categorized the students into four groups: those that did not view *TDS*, those that watched *TDS* casually but followed other news sources more, those that watched *TDS*

regularly but followed other sources as much as *TDS*, and those that watched *TDS* more regularly than they accessed any other news source. Their results demonstrated that heavy viewers of *TDS* exhibited no more knowledge about political issues than non-viewers. Also, the study revealed that heavy viewers were no more politically engaged than non-viewers. However, heavy viewers tended to overrate their political knowledge and were slightly more cynical about the political system than others. The authors concluded that heavy praise of *TDS* was unwarranted (Baumgartner & Morris, 2011). Prior (2003) also argued that while viewers may obtain information from soft news programs, they prefer hard news. Specifically, participants viewed the content of hard news as more important than the content of soft news (Prior, 2003). These few studies suggest that *TDS* may not demonstrate a strong agenda setting effect.

Soft News and Viewer Attitudes and Behaviors. Whether or not programs like *TDS* actually inform their viewers, they may influence viewer attitudes and behaviors (Feldman et al., 2011; Young & Ersalew, 2011; Xenos, Moy, & Becker, 2011). If so, an agenda setting effect for *TDS* should be observable.

Feldman et al. (2011) assessed the impact of viewing satirical news shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* on viewer attentiveness towards news about science, the environment, and global warming. The researchers analyzed the results of a large national survey (n=2,164) and controlled for a number of factors, including age, sex, education, and political orientation. The findings suggest that comedy viewers had significantly elevated attentiveness towards news about science, the environment, and global warming. In the context of agenda setting theory, increased attentiveness may imply higher likelihood of adopting the media agenda. Viewers with less education

appeared particularly susceptible to increased attentiveness. The researchers suggest a “gateway” hypothesis as an explanation: comedy packaging increases the ease of understanding science news, decreasing viewers’ costs of attending to science news in the future. This gateway explanation is connected to agenda setting theory, which assumes that agenda setting effects are a result of increased issue accessibility. Thus, if some news content sticks at the front of people’s minds effectively, it is more likely to cause an agenda setting effect. Thus, if *TDS* increases viewer attentiveness about a particular issue, it should also create an agenda setting effect.

Strong evidence suggests that watching soft news programming may increase engagement in politics (Young & Esralew, 2011). If true, this would also imply an agenda setting effect for soft news programs. This further strengthens the gateway explanation forwarded by Feldman et al (2011) since engagement with a particular necessarily reflects a higher degree of accessibility for that issue. Additionally, Young and Esralew (2011) explored the connection between political behaviors and viewership of *TDS*. Using survey data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Survey, they ran regression models to predict the impact of *TDS* viewership on political participation and rates of political discussion with friends, family, and coworkers. Their results illustrated that, even when controlling for a wide variety of factors including education, gender, and partisanship, viewers of *TDS* were more likely to participate in political activities like volunteering or discussing political issues with friends. The authors concluded that their study supports previous research indicating that *TDS* improves political awareness and rejects previous studies indicating *TDS* increases political cynicism.

Thus the bulk of research about *TDS* suggests that the program not only informs

viewers, but also increases their political engagement and creates a gateway to facilitate further issue information-gathering. Since all of these factors are linked with agenda setting, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3A: Participants who view a humorous soft news clip about immigration will rate immigration as more important than participants who view a mainstream news clip about immigration.

H3B: Participants who view a humorous soft news clip about veteran's benefits will rate immigration as more important than participants who view a mainstream news clip about veterans' benefits.

Confirmation of these hypotheses would confirm that the *TDS* does exhibit agenda setting power, even if that power is less significant than that of traditional news sources.

Elaboration Likelihood, Humor, and Source Credibility: Effects on Agenda Setting

Given the popularity of agenda setting theory in mass communication research, surprisingly little scholarship has focused on the cognitive mechanisms underlying the theory. Early agenda setting researchers called for additional explanation of the cognitive mechanisms underpinning agenda setting (Lang & Lang, 1983), but only a limited number of studies attempted to fill the gap. Despite the dearth of studies directly exploring the mediating factors of agenda setting, similar research on persuasion from the social psychology and political psychology fields hold promise for agenda setting research. A better understanding of how agenda setting occurs would allow researchers to extend the theory to other forms of media and communication. It is likely that the level of attentiveness to a particular media clip, being very engaged or not at all

engaged, plays a vital role in agenda setting. In other words, does agenda setting also occur because viewers are simply paying more attention to a particular clip? Are agenda setting effects hindered if one is not attentive? How does attentiveness to media clips matter, if it does at all? I attempt to illustrate this connection in the following section.

Below, I outline the interactions between dual processing theories of persuasion and relate this to agenda setting theory. I argue that elaboration likelihood, humor, and source credibility may each play a role in producing agenda setting effects.

Elaboration Likelihood Model. At the center of the debate about how agenda setting effects occur are dual processing theories (Bulkow, Urban, & Schwieber, 2013). Dual processing theories begin from the premise that human cognitive capacity is finite, and that people can process only limited amounts of information (Kahneman, 1973). As a result, the human brain uses two pathways or systems to deal with new information. The first system might be described as automatic, instinctual, or subconscious, and processes information quickly and effortlessly. The second system demands attention, mental effort, and active concentration. The capacity of second system is limited by time and energy, so the brain processes most new stimuli via the first system (Kahneman, 2013). The elaboration likelihood model, among the most widely recognized and researched of the dual processing models, labels these routes “central” and “peripheral,” respectively (Petty, 1994; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

ELM Overview. The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is among the most developed processing theories. The model grew out of the earlier “single-effect” and “single-process” paradigms of persuasion research, in which variables influencing

persuasion were thought to affect outcomes via a single mechanism (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). By the mid-1970s this approach became untenable due to increasing contradictory findings. Norman (1976), for example, demonstrated that increasing the number of arguments about an issue did not necessarily increase persuasion. Rogers (1983) showed that negative emotions could, in some circumstances, increase persuasive capacity. These studies contradicted the single-process paradigm because they showed that variables like source credibility, emotional state, or number of arguments could help or hinder persuasion in different contexts (Petty, Wheeler & Bizer, 1999). Petty and Cacioppo (1981) developed the ELM to organize apparently contradictory findings in persuasion research into a coherent model.

The ELM is a dual processing theory that posits two routes to persuasion: central and peripheral. According to the ELM, a diverse range of variables can exhibit diverse influences on persuasion depending on which route a person uses to process a given piece of information. For example, a person reviewing a list of arguments through the peripheral route might examine the first two arguments carefully and ignore the rest, or might skim all the arguments without carefully evaluating any. Meanwhile, a person processing information through the central route might scrutinize each argument (Petty, Wheeler, & Bizer, 1999). Both the central and peripheral processors may or may not be persuaded by the arguments, depending on an array of other variables. However, many studies have demonstrated that persuasion through the central route is typically stronger, longer lasting, and more resistant to counterargument (Chaiken, 1980; Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992).

The exact mechanics by which a person chooses to process new information

with the automatic or intentional system remains a subject of debate. However, the decision appears to hinge on personal needs and desires, also known as issue involvement (Kahneman, 2013; Bulkow et al., 2013). If a person's issue involvement is low, this person is more likely to process information through the largely unconscious, peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Conversely, when issue involvement is high, a person is more likely to process information through the conscious, central route (Petty & Cacioppo; 1981). Thus, a person afflicted by a severe peanut allergy is likely to consciously process the ingredients list on a package of food (high-issue involvement), while a person with no allergy is more likely to skim the list (low-issue involvement). In the context of news, a person very concerned with a particular policy issue is more likely to examine news stories about that issue closely.

The ELM as a Mediating Factor for Agenda Setting. The question of whether adoption of the media agenda by audiences is a central or peripheral process lies at the center of the debate about the causes of agenda setting. Although several studies have argued for the automatic processing theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1977; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Coleman & Wu, 2010), other research appears to contradict these findings in favor the central processing route (Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Roessler, 1999; Lasorsa & Wanta, 1990). Thus, although some research indicates a central processing explanation for agenda setting effects, other research reports peripheral processing. No one definitive study fully explains the mechanisms behind agenda setting, leading Bulkow et al. (2013) to suggest that each processing route may play a role in agenda-setting effects depending on the person.

Peripheral Processing and Agenda Setting. Among the studies contributing to

the peripheral processing route theory of agenda setting are the theories founders, Shaw and McCombs (1977). They saw agenda setting as an “inevitable byproduct” of news consumption (p. 11), suggesting that viewers do not consciously consider the importance of issues presented by the media. Instead, they posit that the stories granted most attention by the news media become more accessible in the minds of viewers and therefore seem more important. Much agenda setting research locates the source of the effect in the availability or accessibility of an issue, not in information about the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Thus, the mere presence of a particular issue in the news should be sufficient to demonstrate an agenda setting effect even if all the news stories downplay the significance of issue.

Coleman and Wu (2010) also provided evidence in favor of a peripheral processing view of agenda setting effects. They argued that emotion plays a significant role, especially in second-level agenda setting. They compared visualizations of John Kerry and George W. Bush broadcast on major television channels with survey results and found that the media “emotional-affective” agenda correlated closely with the public’s emotional perspectives on candidates. Their findings also suggested that agenda setting effects were greater on the audiences’ feelings than on the audiences’ cognitive assessments of the candidates’ character (Coleman & Wu, 2010). In other words, unconscious, emotional reactions seem to count more than conscious, deliberative assessments. Since comedy programs like *TDS* tend to be more emotionally engaging than traditional news broadcasts, this phenomenon implies that *TDS* should hold comparatively more agenda setting power.

Central Processing and Agenda Setting. However, many researchers have

critiqued the peripheral explanation as inadequate because it fails to consider evidence of agenda setting in active consumers of news. For example, Wanta (1997) disputed the accessibility explanation, arguing that individuals actively process news content with the intent of discovering which issues are important. Notably, Miller (2007) conducted an experiment that challenged the accessibility explanation for agenda setting. The experiment exposed undergraduate students to newspaper articles about crime. One article suggested crime was a serious and growing problem, while the other held that crime was a small and declining problem. Regardless of the article they read, students rated crime as a more important issue than students who read no articles about crime. Meaning in one sentence. However, students in the high crime condition cited crime as a significantly more important issue than students in the low crime condition. This result argues that agenda setting occurs through both the peripheral and central routes, but may be more potent through the central route. Ultimately, Miller (2007) concluded that accessibility alone fails to explain fully agenda setting effects, and that the actual content of a news story matters.

Additionally, Eveland's (2004) study of political discussions demonstrated that frequency of exposure to political information had no discernable influence on political knowledge. Instead, gains in political knowledge seemed to derive exclusively from elaboration occurring through political discussion. Thus, it is possible that simply hearing about an issue could not possibly set the agenda. These three studies challenge the peripheral hypothesis for agenda setting because it suggests that exposure is insufficient to account for changes in accessibility. Careful scrutiny of political argument seems necessary, then, for changes in the public agenda.

Supporting the central processing view of agenda setting effects are several studies isolating an individual's need for orientation (NFO) about a particular issue as an independent variable predicting adoption of the media agenda. Need for orientation refers to the degree to which a person desires additional information or understanding about an issue. Chernov, Valenzuela, and McCombs (2011) compared two different measures of NFO as they relate to agenda setting. The study demonstrated that, irrespective of which measure is used, high levels of NFO predict a strong agenda-setting effect. Although, their research only established a correlation between NFO and first-level agenda setting, a causal relationship seems probable because NFO intuitively drives media consumption.

Additionally, in a two-wave panel study combining a panel survey with extensive content analysis television news and newspaper stories, Matthes (2008) revealed that NFO contributed to first-level agenda setting. However, the research did not find evidence that NFO contributed to second-level agenda setting. Studies linking NFO with agenda-setting support the deliberative, intentional model because they suggest that the closer attention an individual pays to a story, the greater the agenda setting effect will be. Thus, agenda setting does not *only* occur because of repeated exposure to an issue. It likely occurs because individuals are highly motivated to develop a perspective on a particular issue.

It is also likely that the central and peripheral models for agenda setting are not mutually exclusive and may be complementary. Bulkow, Urban, and Schweiger (2013) observed agenda setting effects regardless of whether an audience pays close attention to a news story or merely skims it. Their findings revealed that less-involved persons

who initially rated an issue as unimportant and highly-involved persons who initially rated an issue as very important ultimately end up with the same rating of issue importance, if media emphasis is strong enough (Bulkow et al., 2013). In other words, agenda setting may occur in either the peripheral or central processing route depending on who is consuming the media and why. However, the authors posited that, for individuals with low issue involvement, agenda setting effects were likely to be unstable and easily changeable compared to individuals with high issue involvement. This study helped extend the Bulkow et al. (2013) study by exploring agenda setting effects on a single issue among people of varying degrees of issue involvement.

Indirect evidence strongly suggests that how people process information from the media should alter the agenda setting power of the media. The ELM implies that people watching television news are likely to tune out until a story of particular interest or importance to them captures their full attention. Those with low issue involvement for a particular story may still skim headlines or glance at the television, but they “do not try to remember details” (Bulkow et al., 2013, p. 46). People with high issue involvement read or watch each story carefully, weigh competing arguments, and critically analyze content. Whether agenda setting occurs through the conscious or automatic system remains an open question. Surprisingly, even information processed via subconscious, automatic channels can lead to changes in judgment (Shapiro, Heckler, & McGinnis, 1997). Given that persuasion occurring through the central route is longer lasting and stronger than persuasion through the peripheral route (Chaiken, 1980; Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986; Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992), we should expect that agenda setting through the central route is similarly stronger and longer

lasting.

H4_A: Participants reporting higher elaboration likelihood for the immigration clip will also rate immigration as more important than people reporting lower elaboration likelihood.

H4_B: Participants reporting higher elaboration likelihood for the veteran's benefits clip will also rate veteran's benefits as more important than people reporting lower elaboration likelihood.

These hypotheses predict that the more attention participants pay to the clips they watch, the greater the chance they will rate the issues discussed as important. If supported by the data, it would establish elaboration likelihood as a mediating factor for agenda setting effects.

Humor and Agenda Setting. Studies of humor in persuasion suggest that humor may affect the agenda setting power of particular forms of media. Sternthal and Craig (1973) suggested that humor enhances persuasion by encouraging audience engagement with the argument. This suggests that comedic programming like *TDS* may exhibit greater persuasive power than hard news. Moreover, Young (2008) demonstrated that humor can bring particular ideas to the front of an audience's mind. These studies connect with the accessibility mechanism proposed for agenda setting. Therefore, if humor increases the attention paid to a particular issue, then humorous coverage of a particular news issue should enhance that issues place on the agenda. In this study, we should expect the humorous content of *TDS* to encourage greater audience engagement and, consequently, larger agenda setting effects.

H5: Participants will report higher elaboration likelihood for the clip from The Daily Show than the clip from the hard news source.

The fifth hypothesis predicts that *The Daily Show* will engage the attention of viewers more effectively than traditional news sources. If confirmed, it would help to explain why *TDS* might have greater agenda setting power than traditional news sources.

Source Credibility and Agenda Setting. Another potential mediating variable for agenda setting is source credibility. The credibility an individual attributes to a particular source may play an important role in determining the agenda setting power of that source. The role of source credibility as a mediating factor in political framing has been well documented (Brewer, 2001; Druckman, 2001; Zaller, 1992). First, Zaller's (1992) analysis argued that citizens resist or accept persuasion based on their preexisting beliefs about an issue and the perceived credibility of the source of the argument. Thus, left-leaning individuals are more likely to be persuaded by a Democratic politician while right-leaning individuals are more likely to be persuaded by a Republican politician. In this current study, we expect that an individual's political affiliation may affect his or her reaction to media content.

Additionally, Brewer's (2001) study of participants' interactions with value-laden arguments about welfare reform seemed to provide evidence that audiences thoughtfully evaluate arguments rather than simply reacting to them. Finally, Druckman (2001) conducted an experiment in which participants read an article in the *New York Times* or *National Enquirer* about an upcoming Ku Klux Klan rally on a college campus. Readers of the *New York Times* article shifted their opinions substantially,

while readers of the *National Enquirer* showed almost no change. These findings reveal that “perceived source credibility is a prerequisite for successful framing” (Druckman, 2001, p. 1058).

Although the importance of source credibility in determining whether an audience will accept or reject a particular frame is established, the interaction between source credibility and the ELM remains an open and interesting question. Zaller’s (1992) work assumes that audiences are “passive receivers” of messages and that they rely on source credibility as a heuristic device or cue to quickly accept or dispense with persuasive attempts. Conversely, Brewer (2001) argued that audiences were more circumspect, carefully evaluating messages and using source credibility as a primary determinant for accepting or rejecting a frame. It may be that source credibility is an easily deployed heuristic device allowing audiences to accept or disregard a message without much thought, or it may be that source credibility emerges as an important factor only when audiences deliberate thoughtfully about an argument or message.

H6A: Participants who rate a video clip as having higher source credibility will also rate immigration (the topic discussed in the clip) as more important than people who rate the video clip as having lower source credibility.

H6B: Participants who rate a video clip as having higher source credibility will also rate veteran’s benefits (the topic discussed in the clip) as more important than people who rate the video clip as having lower source credibility.

These hypotheses predict a relationship between source credibility and agenda setting. If confirmed, it suggests that media consumers critically evaluate media content and that those evaluations influence the agenda setting power of the content.

Comparative Studies in Agenda Setting. Chong and Druckman (2007) noted that most studies of agenda setting, framing, and priming have ignored competition between different types of communication. Instead, they have explored media effects of a particular type of communication. For example, Iyengar and Kinder's (1987) experiments exposed individuals to communications about environmental or defense policies, but not both. Thus, the study could not compare effects across issues in the same person. Similarly, Moy, Xenos, and Hess (2005) studied priming effects of late night comedy programming, but did not compare those late night comedy shows with other programming. Much of the nonexperimental work in agenda setting is similarly unable to make comparisons due to the nature of their research designs. McCombs and Shaw's (1972) study and Funkhouser's (1973) study relied on content analysis of newspaper articles correlated with changes in survey data without controlling for the types of media the survey participants consumed. While these studies are valuable for providing the theoretical foundations of agenda setting, they have provided little information about how different forms of media alter the public's agenda in comparison to each other.

A few studies have attempted to compare audience reactions to different stimuli. However, many of these studies compared different frames across the same types of media. For example, Miller (2007) had students read newspaper articles framing crime as either a high importance issue or a low importance issue. Participants in Kim and Kioussis's (2012) study read positive, negative, and neutral blog articles, while Druckman's (2001) experiment asked participants to read statements from different websites. These studies illustrated the importance of frames in agenda setting by

comparing different frames in the same type of content. However, they do not allow for comparison across different types of media (i.e., hard news versus comedy). This study extends agenda setting theory by exploring differences in effect from different types of media coverage of the same issue. Specifically, it tests whether comedic programming about immigration and veteran's benefits are more or less effective when compared to hard news programming.

Kowalewski (2011) tested for differences in agenda setting effects as a result of presentation style in an experimental study. Participants listened to audio recordings of hard news as compared to humorous entertainment news. The results suggested that presentation style plays an inconsistent role in agenda setting (Kowalewski, 2011). However, a number of elements of the research design limited the efficacy of the study. First, stimulus materials were mock radio broadcasts, an undesirable attribute since college-age participants of the study are substantially less likely to listen to the radio on a regular basis than to consume media via television or the Internet. According to a recent Pew study, only a third of Americans regularly get news from radio broadcasts.

Second, the study did not include a measurement for how much attention participants paid to the hard news or entertainment news broadcasts. Instead, all participants were asked to complete a Sudoku puzzle while listening to the broadcasts. This strategy provides no real information about how much attention participants paid to each broadcast and supplied an external stimulus (the puzzle) that could be significantly more or less distracting than stimuli participants would encounter in real world media consumption settings. Finally, the study used only one posttest to measure agenda setting effects, so it could not detect sleeper effects. It may be that entertainment news

exhibits little agenda setting effect in the short term but is more memorable and, consequently, increases its influence over time.

Proposed Hypotheses

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to test agenda setting theory. Specifically, this study seeks to compare the relative effectiveness of different types of media content in setting the public agenda. As a result, the dependent variable for each hypothesis is the agenda setting effect of a particular video clip. I examined the agenda setting effect in relation to three independent variables: the type of media content viewed by the participant, the participants' perception of the credibility of the video's source, and the participant's attentiveness to the video clip. With these goals in mind, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1_A: Participants who view a short clip from The Daily Show about immigration will rate immigration as more important than people who view no clip.

H1_B: Participants who view a short mainstream news clip about immigration will rate immigration as a more important issue than people who view no clip.

H2_A: Participants who view a short clip from The Daily Show about veteran's benefits will rate veteran's benefits as more important than people who view no clip.

H2_B: Participants who view a short mainstream news clip about veteran's benefits will rate veteran's benefits as more important than people who view no clip.

H3_A: Participants who view a humorous soft news clip about immigration will rate immigration as more important than participants who view a mainstream news clip about immigration.

H3_B: Participants who view a humorous soft news clip about veteran's benefits will rate immigration as more important than participants who view a mainstream news clip about veterans' benefits.

H4_A: Participants reporting higher elaboration likelihood for the immigration clip will also rate immigration as more important than people reporting lower elaboration likelihood.

H4_B: Participants reporting higher elaboration likelihood for the veteran's benefits clip will also rate veteran's benefits as more important than people reporting lower elaboration likelihood.

H5: Participants will report higher elaboration likelihood for the clip from The Daily Show than the clip from the hard news source.

H6_A: Participants who rate a video clip as having higher source credibility will also rate immigration (the topic discussed in the clip) as more important than people who rate the video clip as having lower source credibility.

H6_B: Participants who rate a video clip as having higher source credibility will also rate veteran's benefits (the topic discussed in the clip) as more important than people who rate the video clip as having lower source credibility.

Chapter Three Preview

In the following third chapter, I explicate this study's methodological approach, provide a justification for the positivist, quantitative approach to agenda setting research, and review details the parameters of the investigation. Also reviewed are the study's participants and the statistical tests required to answer the challenge of each of these hypotheses.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Methodological Approach

The study of agenda setting theory demands a positivistic and quantitative approach. Positivism, in the context of social scientific research, refers to the epistemological viewpoint that truth exists as an external, observable and definable reality (Crotty, 1998). The viewpoint of positivism contrasts with constructivism, which assumes that truth is subjective and dependent upon experience. The core assumption of positivism, that a single objective reality exists, demands that researchers attempt to maximize their objectivity in the collection and analysis of data. Researchers are always limited by their subjective experience of the world, but carefully controlled experiments and pre-established rules for data collection can limit interference from biases and preconceptions (Crotty, 1998). Although other methods are available to positivist scholars, quantitative methods are often preferred. Quantitative research deals with numerical data that can be subjected to rigorous statistical analysis. Quantitative methods are usually preferable because they help to limit the imposition of researcher biases on the collection and analysis of data.

With this in mind, quantitative research is the best way to answer the proposed hypotheses and research questions. The central prediction of the theory, that the media transfers its priorities to its audience, is directly observable in the real world. That is, the theory depends upon the assumption that an external reality exists, that the occupants of that reality obey laws of cause and effect and that their behaviors are observable and quantifiable. Additionally, agenda setting theory deals with the effects of mass

communication. Quantitative methods offer the ability to investigate media effects on a large number of people, while other methods would restrict researchers to a smaller and therefore less helpful sample. Consequently, virtually all previous studies extending the theory have operated within an intrinsically positivistic epistemology.

Study Sample

Between 150-250 participants from introductory communication classes at a major university in the Southwest United States were recruited using the non-probability sampling method *convenience sampling*. Participants were included in the study if they are over 18 years of age. Other than the 18 or older age requirement, there were no exclusion criteria for this project. Participants in this experiment were all students enrolled in introductory communication studies classes at a large, western public university in Texas. A total of 143 individuals participated in the study. They ranged in age from 18 to 51 years ($M= 20.4$, $SD=3.68$). The participant population included 78 males (54.5%) and 64 females (45.5%). The sample identified as politically moderate. Political affiliation was measured using a Likert-type scale (1= “very conservative,” 2=“conservative,” 3=“moderate,” 4= “liberal,” 5= “very liberal”); most participants rated themselves as moderate ($M=2.69$, $SD=1.05$).

Research Procedures

To test the proposed hypotheses, between 100-250 participants were recruited for a quasi- experimental study examining the agenda setting effects of a particular piece of media. Participants were recruited through a short presentation at the end of their class periods. Those expressing a willingness to participate were given two informed consent forms. They kept the first form. They returned the second form and provided

their email addresses for the sole purpose of conducting the survey. Although the use of student volunteers poses some problems for the generalizability of the study, student samples have been used in many previous agenda setting experiments (Kowalewski, 2011). All surveys were completed electronically online using Survey Monkey. After a brief in-class recruitment, participants were asked via email to complete a web-based survey including a series of questions and a video clip.

After collection of 250 email addresses in communication classes, participants were randomly assigned to treatment and control groups of the independent variable (video content): one group viewing two clips from *TDS*, one viewing two clips from an ABC hard news broadcast, and one group viewing no clips. The grouping of participants allowed the researcher to compare agenda setting effects of comedic and hard news against each other and against a control. This design is similar to those used in previous experimental agenda setting studies (Chernov et al., 2011; Iyengar et al., 1982). For the two treatment groups, those groups seeing *TDS* or hard news, participants completed a brief collection of demographic questions and a measure of agenda priorities. Thereafter, they watched the clip and completed measures of their perception of the clips credibility and of their attentiveness to the clip. One week after completing the initial survey, participants completed a second survey containing only a measure of issue importance. Participants in the control group only completed one survey.

Confidentiality. Of particular concern to this project was the ability to be able to identify participants while also maintaining confidentiality. This is important to the study design because participants in the two treatment groups completed a final survey

one week after returning the first survey. To this end, participants were identified uniquely by their email addresses. This identification ensured that their scores on the first survey and the second survey can be properly matched and analyzed.

Dependent and Independent Measures

This study seeks to compare the relative effectiveness of different types of media content in setting the public agenda. As a result, the dependent variable for each hypothesis is the agenda setting effect of a particular video clip. I studied the agenda setting effect in relation to four independent variables: the type of media content viewed by the participant (either TDS, hard news, or no video), the source credibility of the video's media source using the source credibility scale, media trust (five Likert scale items taken from the news consumption scale), and the participant's attentiveness to the video clip (using ELM questions about media attentiveness).

Below, information about how these items are measured, as well as previous scholarly validation, are provided.

Dependent Variable: Agenda Setting. I measured agenda setting effects, the dependent variable, with a survey item asking participants to rate the importance of a number of policy issues on a five-point Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = Not very important; 2 = Somewhat important; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Somewhat important; 5 = Very important). Public opinion research companies and organizations use this measure frequently to gauge the relative importance of particular issues to the public (*Economist*, 2010). Higher scores on the scale represent a higher degree of importance for an issue on the public agenda.

Participants completed this measure on three occasions over the course of the study: immediately before viewing the clip to provide a baseline for comparison, immediately after viewing the clip to demonstrate the immediate impact of the media content on the baseline scores, and approximately one week after viewing the clip to test the agenda setting effect over a specified period of time. Completing the agenda setting measure on two separate occasions is important because doing so tests the agenda setting effects before the video is shown to establish a baseline for comparison, after the video is shown to determine whether the video had an immediate agenda setting impact, and one week after to determine whether agenda setting holds over a specified period of time.

Independent Variable: Media Presentation Style. The first independent variable, media content, is the only experimentally manipulated independent variable in this study. By experimentally manipulated, this infers that the independent variable is split into three experimental groups, referred to as types of media content viewed: TDS (experimental group one), Hard News (experimental group two), and No Video (control group). The division of participants into two treatment groups and one control group facilitated the comparison of agenda setting effects between viewers of content from each type. Thus, while participants are recruited, approximately 45-50 students watched TDS, 45-50 watched hard news, and 45-50 functioned as the control group and did not see a video. The type of media content viewed, the independent variable, is also a nominal variable. Nominal variables have data, which is measured by comparing one category to another category. Nominal variables then “name, identify, or represent the value of something...like political affiliation (Republican, Democrat, Independent) or

biological sex (male or female)” (Field, 2009, p. 32).

The media content independent variable in this study includes three categories: comedic news (TDS), hard news (a mainstream media clip), or no video clip (control group). Participants were randomly assigned to each of the three groups on the IV (media content) and had an equal chance of being selected to view one of the three types of media content. However, participants were recruited using non-probability sampling, convenience, in their introduction to communication classes.

Independent Variable: Source Credibility. The second independent variable is source credibility. Source credibility is a continuous variable, which means the survey uses question items to which researchers assign numerical values. Specifically, for continuous variables, the “measurement items (questions) give us a score for each participant (who takes the survey) and (each item) can take on (represent) any value on the measurement (scale) that we are using” (Field, 2009, p. 10). This study evaluated source credibility using a scaled developed and validated by McCroskey and Teven (2013). It measures source credibility as an index composed of three numerical constructs, competence (or expertise on the subject), goodwill (or the audience’s positive perception of the speaker’s intentions), and trustworthiness (or the credibility of the speaker on the subject), across 19 semantic differential items. Consistent with prior research, this instrument demonstrated high levels of reliability indicated by Cronbach’s alpha $\alpha=.817$, (Competence $\alpha =.83$, Trustworthiness $\alpha =.81$, and Goodwill $\alpha =.81$). These high levels of reliability indicate that the measurement scale actually measures source credibility and not something else entirely (Field, 2009).

Independent Variable: Viewer Attentiveness. The third independent variable is viewer attentiveness. Viewer attentiveness is also a continuous level variable because the question items are assigned numerical values based on the scale we are using (viewer attentiveness) and also because continuous variables give us a score for each participant who takes the survey. To measure attentiveness, viewers completed an elaboration measure developed by Reynolds (1997) for a study involving news articles. The scale was tested across several studies and found to have a high degree of reliability ($\mu=.86$ to $.94$) over several studies. This high degree of reliability explains that the questions on the measurement scale actually do measure viewer attentiveness, and not something else entirely. Participants responded to the following prompts using a Likert-type scale with seven points (1=disagree, 7=agree). The goal of the measure is to determine whether a participant processed the video clip through the central or peripheral routes. The items on the scale have been slightly modified to reflect a video clip instead of a text article.

Independent Variable: Media Trust. The media trust independent variable consists of using four items, measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 – 5 (1= Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly disagree). The four items are as follows. Item one asks: You trust the television to report the news fairly; Item two: You trust the press to report the news fairly; Item three: You trust the Internet to report the news fairly; Item 4: You trust the media to cover the things that matter to you. Together, these items measure media trust. The goal of this measure is to determine participants' thoughts regarding reporting of the news in general. This variable provides descriptive information about the participants in this study. It may also be helpful to

know their thoughts about media trust, as this information may aid in interpretation of the study results.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Statistical tests are selected based on the type of data available: nominal, ordinal, interval or ratio. The number of dependent and independent variables included in the study also determine the usefulness and applicability of statistical tests (Field, 2009). In this study, there is one continuous dependent variable (agenda setting effect) and four independent variables: media type (categorical), ELM (continuous), media trust (continuous), and source credibility (continuous). For each hypothesis, I calculated a one-way ANOVA to determine whether or not significant differences exist between various conditions. For example, the one-way ANOVA for *H1* evaluated the variance within and between groups of participants who viewed the *TDS* and *ABC News* clips, respectively, on the dependent variable of issue importance for immigration and veterans' affairs. A statistically significant *F* value indicated different agenda setting effects for each type of clip.

Chapter Four Preview

In the following fourth chapter, results from data analysis are presented. Specifically, I provide each hypothesis separately and then provide a summary of the results of each statistical test. Explanations of the results are also provided in one to two sentences after each hypothesis and statistical information to simply explain the facts and statistics. More in-depth discussion occurs in the fifth chapter. This fourth chapter also includes a brief report on the critical values, confidence intervals, and margins of error each statistic as appropriate.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Below, results from data analysis are presented. Specifically, I provide each hypothesis separately and then provide a summary of the results of each statistical test. Explanations of the results are also provided in one to two sentences after each hypothesis and statistical information to simply explain the facts and statistics. This fourth chapter also includes a brief report on the critical values, confidence intervals, and margins of error each statistic as appropriate.

All participants were asked to view two different video clips. As a stimulus check, each participant was asked whether or not he or she watched each clip as requested. For the immigration clip, 73 of the 94 participants in the treatment conditions reported that they watched the clip. For the veterans clip, 68 of the 94 participants in the treatment conditions reported that they watched the clip. Participants who reported that they did not watch a clip were excluded from further statistical analysis measuring the effects of that clip through the filtering function in SPSS.

$H1_A$ and $H1_B$ predicted that participants who viewed clips about immigration from *TDS* and *ABC News*, respectively, would rate immigration as more important than participants in the control group. To test these hypotheses, a one-way ANOVA comparing post-test immigration importance for the treatment groups against the control group was computed. Neither the effect for *TDS*, $F(1,70) = .787, p = .378$, nor the effect for *ABC News*, $F(1, 66) = .035, p = .852$, were significant. $H1$ and $H2$ were not supported. Thus, clips from *TDS* and *ABC News* had no detectable influence on

participants' ratings of the importance of immigration as a political issue.

$H2_A$ and $H2_B$ predicted that participants who viewed clips about veterans' affairs would rate veterans' affairs as more important than those who viewed no clips. One-way ANOVAs showed significant effects for both the *TDS*, $F(1, 66) = 4.828, p = .032$, and *ABC News*, $F(1, 66) = 4.106, p = .047$. Thus, $H3$ and $H4$ were supported. Unlike the clips about immigration, participants viewing *TDS* and *ABC News* clips about veterans' affairs rated veterans' affairs as more important than participants who did not view a clip.

$H3_A$ and $H3_B$ predicted that *TDS* clips would exert greater influence on participants' rating of issue importance than *ABC News* clips for the issues of immigration and veterans' affairs, respectively. However, one-way ANOVAs comparing the treatment groups for the issues of immigration, $F(1, 65) = .488, p = .487$, and veterans' affairs, $F(1, 61) = .033, p = .857$, revealed no significant difference. $H5$ and $H6$ were not supported. There was no discernable difference in agenda setting power between *TDS* and *ABC News* clips for either issue.

$H4_A$ and $H4_B$ predicted that participants who were more attentive to clips about immigration and veterans' affairs, respectively, would rate those issues as more important than participants who were less attentive. To test these hypotheses, I divided participants on the median (3.6250) into two equal groups: high-attention and low-attention. A one-way ANOVA indicated that attentiveness was significant for ratings of the importance of immigration, $F(1, 81) = 7.418, p = .008$. However, attentiveness was not a significant factor for ratings of the importance of veterans' benefits, $F(1, 80) =$

.475, $p = .493$. Thus, $H10$ was supported, but $H11$ was not. In other words, participants who were highly attentive to clips about immigration rated immigration as more important than participants who were less attentive to the same clips. For clips about veterans' affairs, however, there was no evidence for this distinction.

$H5$ predicted that participants would report paying more attention to clips from *TDS* than clips from *ABC News*. A one-way ANOVA found no significant difference in attentiveness between clips from the two sources, $F(1, 87) = .000$, $p = .984$. $H12$ was not supported. Thus, participants reported that they were statistically equally attentive to the *TDS* and *ABC News* clips.

$H6_A$ and $H6_B$ predicted that participants who rated a video clip as having higher source credibility would also rate the topic of the clip as more important than those who rated the clip as having lower source credibility. Three factors, competence, goodwill, and trustworthiness, comprise the construct of source credibility. As a result, it was necessary to calculate three one-way ANOVAs to test the hypotheses for agenda setting effects on immigration and veterans' affairs. There were no significant differences in agenda setting effects between participants rating the video clips as high or low-competence for either immigration, $F(1, 63) = .754$, $p = .389$, or veterans' affairs, $F(1, 59) = .305$, $p = .583$. Similarly, there were no significant differences between participants rating the clip sources as high or low-goodwill for either immigration, $F(1, 63) = .738$, $p = .394$, or veterans' affairs, $F(1, 59) = 1.231$, $p = .272$. Finally, there were no significant differences for participants rating the clip sources as high or low-trustworthiness for either immigration, $F(1, 63) = 2.120$, $p = .150$, or veterans' affairs $F(1, 59) = 1.698$, $p = .198$. Thus, $H6_A$ and $H6_B$ were not supported. Source credibility did not play a measurably

significant role in agenda setting effects for either issue.

The results provide some significant insights into role of presentation style and presentation style in agenda setting. Additionally, the results supply additional information on the cognitive mechanisms responsible for agenda setting effects. In the following chapter, I interpret and discuss the results of this experiment. I draw several conclusions about the utility of agenda setting theory in a new media context and suggest several extensions and modifications of the theory.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The results discussed above argue for several extensions and modifications of agenda setting theory. First, the finding that clips from *ABC News* and *TDS* influenced perceptions of the importance of veterans' affairs implies that agenda setting theory applies to web-based video clips, a previously unexamined type of media content. Thus, it is likely that viewing content on the web also exhibits agenda setting effects, like viewing it through another mass communications medium, like television. Second, the absence of any statistical significant difference in agenda setting effects between clips from the hard and soft news sources suggests that presentation style, presentation style, and source credibility may not be important factors in agenda setting. It is likely that exposure to content may be a more significant determiner of agenda setting effects than style, content, and the source of information. Finally, the seemingly contradictory findings for the role of ELM's attentiveness argue for a heightened role of a concept I call "issue saturation" in agenda setting research. In the following chapter, I outline and evaluate these interpretations of the results of this experiment.

Agenda Setting and Content Variables

This experiment yielded interesting results for the agenda setting effect of different kinds of media content. No previous agenda setting studies have used web-based video clips as stimulus materials, so this experiment extends agenda setting theory to a new type of media content. Additionally, few previous studies have evaluated the comparative influence of different types of media content on the public agenda. This study pitted traditional hard news presentation, reflected in the *ABC News* clips against,

against the soft news style of the clips from *TDS*. The following section evaluates the results of this experiment in the context of presentation style and presentational differences.

Agenda Setting and Web-Based Video. First, this study extended agenda setting theory to a new form of media content: short, web-based video clips. The results of this experiment indicate that, at least on the issue of veterans' affairs, short video clips are capable of influencing viewers' opinions on the issues of the day. Previous agenda setting research has identified and confirmed agenda setting effects for newspaper and magazine articles (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), blogs (Sweetser et al., 2008; Meraz, 2010), televised news (Iyengar et al., 1982), soft news programs (Moy, 2005), and even fictional television shows (Holbrook & Hill, 2005). However, no studies to date have investigated the agenda setting potential of web-based video content. This is a significant shortcoming in the literature, both because web-based video clips are often consumed differently than other media content and because web-based videos have emerged as an extremely important source of information and entertainment (Koutsier, 2012). This study provides the first tentative empirical evidence that agenda setting theory applies to this new and important content area, short web-based video-clips.

Notably, this experiment did not find evidence for agenda setting effects for clips about immigration from either *TDS* or *ABC News*. This surprising result is discussed at length in a later section, but does not discount the basic principle that web-based video may exert agenda setting influence on viewers.

Agenda Setting and Presentation style. This experiment also supplies significant insights into the importance of presentation style and genre for agenda-setting effects. As previously noted, few if any agenda setting studies have compared the relative effects of different types of media content. Typical experimental designs have simply exposed participants to a single stimulus and then measured their ratings of issue important. While these designs have been useful for expanding agenda setting theory to new domains, they do not allow researchers to compare the agenda setting power of different kinds of media content. This experiment provides evidence that type of media content may not matter much in terms of agenda setting influence. Instead, it is likely that what matters, is issue-saturation.

The data collected in this experiment reveal no significant difference in effects between clips from the soft news program, *TDS*, and the hard news program, *ABC News*. This is surprising since *ABC News* since the former presents itself as an entertainment program while the latter intends, at least on face, to inform and educate viewers. Despite their different goals, together both programs exert an indistinguishable agenda setting influence on participants. Viewers of both the TDS and ABC News clips significantly increased their ratings of the importance of veterans' affairs and did not alter their ratings of the importance of immigration.

The apparent similarity in agenda setting effects for hard and soft news carries an important implication for the theory. Specifically, it raises the question of whether presentation style matters at *all*. Agenda setting theory began as an explanation of how the news media transfers issue salience to the general public (McCombs, 1972).

However, data from this experiment suggest that agenda setting may not be a function

of news, but rather a function of media in general. If agenda setting is in fact a function of the media, this has implications for the role of the media. For example, as a function of the media, a complete understanding of public agenda at any given point in time would require analysis not only of news content, but also of all media content widely available at that time.

If presentation style does not matter, then simple topical popularity communicated through many media simultaneously may move masses of people to think and act in specific, intended ways. The sudden popularity of a movie about a catastrophic asteroid strike might overwhelm the news media's agenda and cause space exploration to emerge as an important issue, for example. Future research is needed to test whether this is in fact the case.

The possible irrelevance of presentation style and source credibility compared to sheer volume carries important and disturbing implications for political communication, public relations, and democracy. Moving forward, future research should examine the role of topical popularity and issue-saturation in contributing to agenda setting effects. Although the role of issue-saturation is not confirmed by data here, it may play an important role in the communication field. Thus, it is likely that topical popularity communicated through issue-saturation in the media may make significant social contributions impacting peoples' daily lives. For example, the traditional understanding of agenda setting positions news sources as gatekeepers. Newspapers, television news programs, magazines, and other outlets, in this conception, filter out the most pressing and important issues for public scrutiny and deliberation (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This study suggests, however, that the public may not rely on traditional news sources

in forming its agenda. A fire hose seems a more apt metaphor than a filter: various forms of media blast the public with a slew of issues, and those issues that manage to take up the most space end up occupying the public agenda. Future research needs to examine the communicative role of issue-saturation to determine the effects this process has on audiences as a whole.

One crucial implication of issue saturation is that traditional categorization of media formats may be counterproductive. Researchers often differentiate entertainment media from news media, or divide hard news from soft news. This study suggests that, at least in terms of first-level agenda setting, that these classifications may not be as helpful as we believe. It is very possible that the public is potentially equally willing to accept agenda items from pure entertainment as from pure news. If so, theoretical models of media effects, particularly agenda setting theory, should incorporate content from the entire media ecosystem rather than focusing on select sectors. If, for example, hard news and soft news cause the same effects, then the distinction between the two may be irrelevant for media effects research. Perhaps what is more important is the saturation of media content.

Important implications for communications professionals may also exist and should be investigated in future studies. First, it is possible that magnitude counts for much more than finesse. Perhaps the primary communication goal should be making a message omnipresent. If the public really does not evaluate the source of message in deciding whether an issue is important, then perhaps the best recipe for placing an issue at the top of the public agenda is to repeat the message endlessly and in as many different contexts as possible. An organization concerned with advancing “traditional

family values,” for example, would benefit from an integrated campaign including news stories, television advertisements, a YouTube channel, a situation comedy and a radio program. Similarly, feature films about climate change like *The Day After Tomorrow* may play just as significant or even more significant a role in educating the public about environmental issues as traditional journalism. In terms of setting the public agenda, the frequency and volume of the message counts for more than source of the message.

Agenda Setting, ELM, and Source Credibility

By comparing the agenda setting effects of different kinds of media content across multiple issues, this study offers important contributions to our understanding of the cognitive mechanisms underlying the theory. In the following section, I argue that this experiment provides evidence for three contentions about the mediation and moderation of agenda setting: first, presentation style or presentation style does not appear to influence the agenda setting power of stories in the media. Entertainment-style presentation and hard news presentations are equally capable of influencing the public agenda. Second, source credibility also does not alter the agenda setting power of media content. Sources that are regarded as highly credible exert roughly equivalent influence on the public agenda as sources that are less credible. Finally, I argue that issue saturation, or the amount of information already available about an issue, moderates the agenda setting power of any particular unit of media content. The more salient an issue is before the public consumes a story about the issue, the less influence that story will have on the public agenda.

Agenda Setting and Source Credibility. This experiment provides strong evidence that source credibility is not an important mediator for first-level agenda

setting effects. Participants in this experiment rated *TDS* as a significantly less credible source of information in term of goodwill, trustworthiness and competence than *ABC News*. However, participants' wariness towards *TDS* had no discernable effect on their ratings of issue importance, the critical measure of agenda setting. Even though the participants did not trust clips from *TDS* as much as clips from *ABC News*, the difference in trust did not produce a difference in agenda setting effects. Source credibility played no role in altering participants' perceptions of issue importance. Ratings of issue importance after watching clips from *TDS* were statistically indistinguishable from ratings of issue importance after watching clips from *ABC News*.

Furthermore, even within the soft news and hard news conditions, source credibility appeared to play no part in determining agenda setting outcomes. When viewers of clips from *TDS* were divided into high-credibility and low-credibility groups, there was no significant difference in their evaluations of issue importance. The same held true for high-credibility and low-credibility groups in the hard *ABC News* condition. There was no statistically significant effect for source credibility on ratings of the importance of either immigration or veterans' affairs. In other words, source credibility appeared to play no role in the ability of *TDS* or *ABC News* to influence participants' agendas. This finding is surprising in light of strong evidence that source credibility does play a significant role in related concepts like political framing (Brewer, 2001; Druckman, 2011). Future research should seek to confirm these results and investigate whether source credibility matters, and if it does, how much.

Agenda setting theory tells the audience what to think and how to think about it. Thus, if agenda setting effects emerge as a consequence of the public's careful

deliberations on stories they read, hear, or see in the media, source credibility should control the agenda setting power of any individual story. The apparent unimportance of source credibility therefore suggests that agenda setting is not a product of media consumers' careful evaluations of stories and ideas in the media. Instead, agenda setting effects, it appears, are a product of mere exposure to ideas, issues, or concepts. A corollary implication of this finding is that, for the public's evaluation of issue importance, quantity counts more than quality.

This result may have direct implications for people and institutions hoping to alter the public's agenda: Crafting careful and well-researched messages may be a waste of time. The better strategy, it seems, may be to bombard the print media, the airwaves, and the Internet with messages related to the targeted issue without concern for the messages' credibility. Of course, the idea of constantly repeating a message is nothing new for communications professionals. However, the implication of this study that messages from different types of media content can be interchangeable in terms of agenda setting effects suggests that messaging strategies can be much broader. For example, fictional television shows may be just as useful a medium for highlighting an agenda issue as a newspaper article. An organization hoping to place drug abuse at the top of the public agenda might be wise to invest in a *Breaking Bad* spinoff series, for example.

Agenda Setting and the ELM. This study also evaluated the role of attentiveness in agenda setting effects. Surprisingly, experimental data revealed that participants' reported roughly equivalent attentiveness for clips from both *TDS* and *ABC News*. Even though *TDS* is an entertainment program geared at young people,

participants in the *ABC News* condition appeared equally willing to pay attention to the short clips. The best explanation for this finding is that the experimental design did not tax the cognitive resources of participants very much. That is, attentiveness was equivalent across both conditions because paying close attention to short video clips is not very difficult regardless of how entertaining the clip is.

Despite similar levels of attentiveness to clips from different sources, participants reporting different levels of attention responded to the clips differently. To measure the effect of attentiveness on issue evaluations, participants were divided into high-attention and low-attention groups and measured their responses to the clips. The high-attention participants rated immigration as a significantly more important issue after watching the clip than did the low-attention participants. In other words, people who paid close attention to clips about immigration elevated their evaluations of the importance of the issue of immigration more than people who paid less attention. However, this trend did not hold for clips about veterans' affairs. Ratings of the importance veterans' affairs were statistically equivalent for participants in the low-attention and high-attention groups.

The divergence in the apparent importance of attentiveness for agenda setting effects between the two issues examined in this study is puzzling. If attentiveness acts as a mediator for agenda setting effects, it should produce similar effects across various issues. The best explanation for this divergence may derive from different levels of salience for the two issues examined in this study. Specifically, immigration appears to be a more visible and frequently discussed issue than veterans' affairs in the region where the experiment was conducted. Thus, the immigration issue may have already

been prominent in participants' minds. Consequently, participants' perceptions of issue importance were more firmly established for immigration than for veterans' affairs.

Previous literature on the ELM supports this hypothesis.

As noted above, need for orientation (NFO) is an important variable for agenda setting and for the ELM. Previous studies have established that individuals who feel uncertain or unknowledgeable about a certain issue are more likely to pay close attention to that issue and are more susceptible to agenda setting effects resulting from media coverage of that issue (Chernov et al., 2011; Matthes, 2008). In other words, high levels of NFO predict both attentiveness and agenda setting effects. In the context of this experiment, previous research implies that video clips should produce greater agenda setting effects in participants who know less about the issue discussed. If participants had lower NFO towards immigration than towards veterans' affairs, we would anticipate greater agenda setting effects for video clips about the latter issue. Although this study did not measure NFO in participants, some evidence from the experiment and from the broader media environment supports this interpretation of the data.

First, the pre-test for this experiment invited participants to list the three most important issues facing the United States today in an open response form. Coding of these responses indicated that 23 of the 143 (16.1 percent) participants who completed the pre-test though immigration was one of the most important issues. By contrast, none of the 143 participants listed veterans' affairs or any related issue among the three most important. The gap in participants reporting an issue as among the three most important facing the nation indicates that, for the participants in this study, immigration was a

more salient issue than veterans' affairs even before the stimulus.

Public polling data in Texas, the state in which I conducted the experiment, provides additional evidence for this view. According to the Texas Tribune, a polling conducted in October of 2012 asked Texans to identify the most important issues facing the state. Roughly 14% of the sample said immigration was the important issue, and another 13% said border security (Ramsey, 2012). Veterans' affairs and related issues did not receive any substantial portion of votes in the poll. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that issue salience was higher for immigration than veterans' affairs for the sample population.

Issue Saturation

The difference in salience between the two issues supplies an intuitive explanation for the divergent effects of attentiveness. If most participants in the sample were already very familiar with immigration as a political issue, it is very likely that they had already seen, read, and heard many stories about immigration. In other words, the media environment inhabited by participants in the study was already saturated with immigration stories. Consequently, the single video clip about immigration used as stimulus in the experiment was a drop in the bucket. Even for participants who paid close attention to the video, the clip was unlikely to sway their perception of the importance of immigration. By contrast, the absence of veterans' affairs as an issue of importance meant that the single clip on the topic represented a larger fraction of available information. As a result, the clip was more likely to alter participants' perception of the importance of the issue.

The results of this study thus suggest a maxim for future agenda setting research: the saturation of an issue in the media environment moderates the agenda setting influence of any particular unit of media content. Put differently, a single news story tends to have a greater agenda setting effect the more unusual the issue discussed in the story. If economic news dominates a particular media environment, then each additional story about the economy is unlikely to generate a large agenda setting effect. A story about an issue seldom discussed in that environment, however, is more likely to produce agenda setting effects. Even if viewers or readers pay close attention to information presented in a story, if they are already familiar with issue discussed they are unlikely to change their evaluations of the importance of that issue.

Data collected in this study tentatively suggest that issue saturation overwhelms presentation style in determining the agenda setting effects of media content. As noted above, there were no significant differences in issue importance between participants who viewed *TDS* clips and *ABC News* clips. The source of the content and the style of presentation had no discernable difference in agenda setting effects. However, there was a significant difference in the agenda setting effects of content about different issues. The best explanation for the difference appears to be the level of issue salience for each issue independent of the experimental stimulus. The media environment influences the agenda setting power of individual units of media content.

Central and Peripheral Processing

This experiment also sheds light on the ongoing debate as to whether agenda setting effects derive from central or peripheral processing. Specifically, the idea of issue saturation and the differences in effects for immigration and veterans' affairs clips

provides evidence for Bulkow et al.'s (2013) argument that agenda setting may derive from either peripheral or central processing. In the case of veterans' affairs, attentiveness played no role in determining participants' agenda. That suggests that, for the less familiar issue, peripheral processing was completely sufficient to establish the importance of the issue. For immigration, however, only the high-attention group exhibited agenda setting effects. This suggests that for more familiar issues, peripheral processing is insufficient to change perceived levels of importance. If an audience is already knowledgeable about a given topic, any message about that topic must be captivating if it is to change the audience's agenda.

Thus, the differential agenda setting effects of the clips in this experiment argue for a caveat to the earlier recommendation that communicators focus on message quantity rather than message quality. For issues about which the public is unfamiliar or uninformed, message source and quality appear irrelevant. What matters for those issues is simply making the ideas highly accessible. However, for issues that are already perceived as important or often discussed, messages must capture the public's attention to change their agendas. Changing opinion on highly developed or highly saturated issues requires central processing, while changing opinion on unfamiliar issues requires only peripheral processing.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This experiment provides evidence for several interesting modifications and extensions of agenda setting theory. In the following chapter, I review the most important findings emerging from the experiment and place them in broader context of agenda setting research. Although these findings argue strongly for substantive changes in our understanding of agenda setting, the experimental design of this study confers significant limitations. These are also discussed. Finally, based on the limitations of this design, I suggest direction for future research.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

Although this study provides important insights into the agenda setting effects of different types of media content and the mediating and moderating factors for agenda setting, the findings are limited. In the following section, I outline several significant limitations include presentation style, demographic diversity, and measurement techniques. I discuss the implication so of these limitations and suggest directions for future research.

First, the findings discussed above may not be generalizable to media content that aims exclusively to entertain consumers. Although *The Daily Show* calls itself an entertainment program, it also functions as a news program. As discussed above, many of the program's viewers see it as a source of news content even if the show's producers disagree. Thus, *TDS* may be a poor point of comparison with mainstream news programs. The similarities between *ABC News* and *The Daily Show* are likely more

significant than the similarities between *ABC News* and fictional programs. As a result, this studies finding that hard and soft news influence the public agenda similarly may not apply to comparisons between hard news and, for example, *Law and Order*. Agenda setting theory would benefit from future examinations of the differential effects of hard news programs and fictional entertainment programs.

Second, the findings of this experiment may not apply to demographic groups not included in this sample. Participants in this study were young ($M=20.4$, $SD=3.68$). It is conceivable that individuals in different age groups might respond differently to the stimulus materials used in the experiment. Additionally, the entire participant population was drawn from the student body at a major public university in Texas. Obviously, the participant pool was not reflective of broader public. These limitations were unavoidable given time and financial constraints. Researchers should be wary of generalizing findings about college students to other population groups. Ideally, future researchers should conduct similar experiments on more representative samples.

Third, this experimental design relies on a distinction between soft and hard news that may not be justifiable. In recent years, critics have often lamented the apparent corruption of televised news by the desire for ratings (Holbrook & Hill, 2005; Moy et al., 2005). The prevalence of term “infotainment” suggests that the line between hard news and entertainment programming is blurry at best and non-existent at worse. Consequently, one explanation for the similar effects of soft and hard news outlined in this experiment is that soft and hard news are indistinguishable. However, participants consistently rated the source credibility of *TDS* as consistently lower than that of *ABC News*. This suggests that, even if entertainment and news are merging, extant

differences are sufficiently large to produce some different effects.

Fourth, this study included no measures of NFO or issue awareness for the issues discussed in the stimulus materials. Although I collected data on participants' perceptions of issue importance before exposing them to the video clips, I did not ask assess the depth or intensity of participants' feelings about the importance of the issues discussed. Consequently, it is possible that the role of issue saturation discussed above is overstated. Future research should include evaluations of the broader media context in which stimulus materials are presented. For example, content analysis of major newspapers, magazines, and television programs would allow for more accurate extrapolation of the role issue saturation. Additionally, future studies should evaluate the depth and intensity of participants' perceptions of issue importance to allow more effective before-and-after comparisons.

Fifth, I relied on a single item to measure issue important for immigration and veterans' affairs, the dependent variables in this study. Although this practice is relatively standard in previous agenda setting studies (see McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Funkhouser, 1973; Iyengar et al., 1982), the practice leaves much to be desired. Single-item measures are less reliable than measures based on multiple survey items. It is possible, though unlikely, that data collected on the dependent variable in study does not reflect participants true perceptions of issue importance.

Although these limitations constrain the generalizability and reliability of results discussed above, this study still supplies important and useful knowledge about the mediating and moderating factors for agenda setting and the relevance of presentation

style in determining agenda setting effects.

Key Findings

The first major finding from this study is support for the extension of agenda setting theory to web-based video. Although not necessarily surprising, empirical support for this extension is important because web-based videos differ substantially from other media because, unlike news broadcasts or newspapers, video clips are self-contained and often consumed in single servings. While viewers of a televised news program watch several different stories at once, viewers of a video clip on the Internet often watch only a single story before resuming other activities like social networking or playing games. Given the different consumption patterns, the extension of agenda setting theory to this new area reaffirms the significance of the theory in the age of new media and invites additional scholarly attention.

Second, this experiment suggests that presentation style and source credibility may be irrelevant, or less important, to agenda setting effects than previously thought. In other words, entertainment programming and news programming may be indistinguishable in terms of the agenda setting effects they produce. If so, this is an extremely important finding. It tentatively suggests that the intuitive distinctions between news and entertainment are not useful in media effects research and argues for a major modification of media effects research paradigms. Specifically, the findings suggest that agenda setting analyses should examine the effects of media content from all widely available sources instead of narrowing the scope to particular newspapers, new magazines, or television broadcasts. Although additional comparative studies are essential, it appears that the special treatment researchers confer on hard news sources is

unjustifiable.

The implication that entertainment programming and news programming are both capable of setting the public agenda also provides a valuable lesson for communications professionals. Specifically, this finding argues that message source and credibility are significantly less important than volume and repetition. Discussion of an issue across a wide variety of media sources, even if some of them are purely entertainment and completely lacking in credibility, is capable of establishing that issue on the public agenda. At the same time, a thoughtful, well-reasoned message from a highly credible source could have, at best, an equivalent impact on the public agenda. Consequently, organizations hoping to influence the public agenda may be better off focusing their efforts on distributing their message rather than crafting their message.

Third, the finding that differences in source credibility and participant attentiveness are negligible for agenda setting effects provides new insights into cognitive mechanisms underpinning agenda setting. This experiment suggests that agenda setting effects may be a product of either central or peripheral route processing depending on the relative familiarity of the issue at hand. For immigration, an issue that is often discussed and listed as one of the most pressing in Texas, only individuals who processed the clips via the central route changed their perception of issue importance. For veterans' affairs, a less familiar topic, even low-attention participants changed their minds. This suggests that agenda setting effects can emerge from either processing route. Crucially, audience familiarity with the issue seems to dictate whether central processing is required. It appears that the more widely discussed an issue, the higher the bar required to produce agenda setting effects.

As a result, this experiment suggests that future agenda setting research should examine the variable of “issue saturation.” Although agenda setting effects seem possible for any conceivable issue, the rules for agenda setting change may be different for each issue. Issues that already dominate the media ecosystem are unlikely to gain additional traction in the absence of stories that truly captivate audience attention. Conversely, issues that seldom discussed can gain traction merely by their presence. Future research must take this distinction into account.

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APPENDIX

Control Survey

Thank you for participating in this study. This survey will take less than 10 minutes to complete. Please select the best answer the following questions.

1. **What is your email address?** (Note: this information is private. You will only receive emails reminding you to complete the second survey in one week's time. I need your email to match your answers on the first survey, to your answers on the second survey)

2. **Are you:**
 - a. Male

 - b. Female

3. **How old are you?**

4. **How would you describe your political ideology?**
 - a. Very Conservative

 - b. Conservative

 - c. Independent

 - d. Liberal

 - e. Very Liberal

5. In your opinion, please list the three most important issues facing the United States today: _____; _____; _____

Please specify the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*1 = Strongly Agree * 2 = Agree * 3 = Neutral * 4 = Disagree * 5 = Strongly Disagree*

1. It's a regular part of my day to catch up with the news: ____
2. I follow the news to understand what's going on in the world: ____
3. I follow the news to know what other people are talking about: ____
4. It's my duty to keep up with what's going on in the world: _____
5. I have a pretty good understanding of the main issues facing our country: _

Please specify the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

*1 = Strongly Agree * 2 = Agree * 3 = Neutral * 4 = Disagree * 5 = Strongly Disagree*

1. You trust television to report the news fairly: _____
2. You trust the press to report the news fairly: _____
3. You trust the Internet to report the news fairly: ____
4. You trust the media to cover the things that matter to you: _

How important are the following issues to you on a scale 1-5.

*1= Not very important
2=Somewhat un-
important 3= Neutral
4=Somewhat important*

5=Very important

1. The economy and jobs: _____
2. Immigration: _____
3. The environment: ____
4. Veteran's Benefits: _
5. Gay rights: __
6. Education: __
7. Health Care: _
8. Social Security: _____
9. The budget deficit: __
10. Taxes: _____

Treatment Survey

Thank you for participating in this study. This survey will take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Please select the best answer the following questions.

What is your email address? (Note this information will be kept confidential and is only being asked to verify your responses) _____

Please specify whether you agree with the following statements.

*1 =
strongly
agree 2 =
mostly
agree 3 =
neutral
4 = mostly disagree
5 = strongly disagree.*

While viewing the clip were you:

1. Attempting to analyze the issues in the message: _____
2. Not very attentive to the ideas: __
3. Deep in thought about the message: ____
4. Unconcerned with the ideas: ____
5. Extending a good deal of cognitive effort: _____
6. Distracted by other thoughts not related to the message: _____
7. Not really exerting your mind: __
8. Doing your best to think about what was written: _____

9. Reflecting on the implications of the arguments: _____

10. Resting your mind: _____

11. Searching your mind in response to the ideas: __

12. Taking it easy: __

Please select the number below that best corresponds to your feelings about the speaker in the video clip.

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----------|
| Uninformed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Informed |
| Intelligent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Informed |
| Inexpert | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Expert |
| Incompetent | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Competent |
| Bright | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Stupid |
| Trained | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Untrained |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Cares about me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Doesn't care about me |
| Has my interests at heart | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Doesn't have my interests at heart |
| Self-centered | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Not self-centered |
| Insensitive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Sensitive |
| Not understanding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Understanding |
| | | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------|
| Honest | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Dishonest |
| Untrustworthy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Trustworthy |
| Honorable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Dishonorable |
| Moral | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Immoral |
| Unethical | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Ethical |
| Phoney | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Genuine |

How important are the following issues to you on a scale 1-5. *1= Not very important * 2=Somewhat unimportant * 3= Neutral 4=Somewhat important * 5=Very important*

11. The economy and jobs: ____

12. Immigration: _____

13. The environment: __

14. Veteran's Benefits: _____

15. Gay rights: _

16. Education: _

17. Health Care: _____

18. Social Security: ____

19. The budget deficit: _

20. Taxes: _____

Post Test

Thank you for participating in this study. This survey will take less than 5 minutes to complete.

What is your email address? (Note this information will be kept confidential and is only being asked to verify your responses)_____

How important are the following issues to you on a scale 1-5.

*1= Not very important * 2=Somewhat un-important * 3= Neutral * 4=Somewhat important 5=Very importan*

1. The economy and jobs: _____

2. Immigration: _____

3. The environment: ____

4. Veteran's Benefits: _

5. Gay rights: __

6. Education: __

7. Health Care: _

8. Social Security: _____

9. The budget deficit: __

10. Taxes: _____

In the past week, have you watched The Daily Show?

A. Yes B. No

In the past week, have you read anything in a newspaper or magazine about Immigration?

a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you read anything in a newspaper or magazine about Veteran's Benefits?

- a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you watched anything on television about Immigration?

- a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you watched anything on television about Veteran's Benefits?

- a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you read or seen anything on the Internet about Immigration?

- a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you read or seen anything on the Internet about Veteran's Benefits?

- a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you discussed Immigration with friends, family, coworkers, classmates, or acquaintances?

- a. Yes b. No

In the past week, have you discussed Veteran's Benefits with friends, family, coworkers, classmates, or acquaintances?

- a. Yes b. No