SETTING THE AGENDA:
A VIEW OF WESTERN COMMUNICATION SCHOLARS

УСТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ПОВЕСТКИ ДНЯ:
ВЗГЛЯД ЗАПАДНЫХ КОММУНИКАТИВИСТОВ

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The term, "agenda", quite common in modern political communication studies, was coined in the United States. Nowadays, different aspects of agenda setting attract the attention of scholars from all over the world, including Russia. Paying tribute to those Russian researchers who contributed to the exploration of this phenomenon, we deem it necessary to place emphasis on the way agenda is analyzed in Western (mostly Anglo-Saxon) communication studies. Main trends and tendencies of agenda studies by European and American scholars are considered in this article. Similarities and differences between agenda setting and priming, on the one hand, and framing, on the other hand, are analyzed. Special attention is accorded to the patterns of different types of agenda-setting, i.e. political, media, and public, as well as to the correlation between "agenda setting" and "agenda building". The media agendas effects on international relations, which are attracting attention abroad, are also addressed. Twenty-five of the most cited articles about various aspects of an agenda from the database Web of Science contributed to the empirical basis of this paper.

Достаточно хорошо распространенный в современной политической коммуникативистике термин «повестка дня» был впервые введен в научный оборот в Соединенных Штатах. Сегодня сюжеты, связанные с установлением повестки дня, волнуют ученых во всем мире, в том числе — и в России. Отдавая должное российским исследователям этого феномена, считаем необходимым внимательно относиться и к опыту изучения повестки дня в западной науке. В настоящей статье рассматриваются основные направления и тенденции анализа категории «повестка дня» европейскими и американскими учеными. Выделяются сходства и различия установления повестки дня, с одной стороны, и фрейминга и прайминга — с другой. Отдельное внимание уделяется принципам взаимодействия между собой различных видов повесток: политической, медийной и публичной, а также соотношению понятий «установление» и «строительство» повестки дня. Затрагивается также набирающий все большую популярность в зарубежной коммуникативистике вопрос о роли медийной повестки дня применительно к международным отношениям. Эмпирической базой настоящего исследования стали 25 самых цитируемых журнальных статей базы данных Web of Science, посвященных различным аспектам повестки дня.

Ключевые слова: *информационная повестка дня; установление повестки дня; строительство повестки дня; фрейминг; прайминг; оценочный тон.*

It is argued here that the constantly increasing technological diversity of modern mass media makes them more attractive and accessible for various segments of society. As a result, even those who have never been interested in politics, often begin to discuss different social and political

issues with their friends, colleagues, or relatives. Due to the Internet (primarily – social networks) people can, to a large extent, be involved in political communication spontaneously and involuntarily. Even when someone joins a social network just for communicating with his or her friends, there are ample opportunities to stumble upon political news (e.g. among his or her friends' updates). Sometimes such issues attract users' attention, and even change their attitude toward them. In this context, the kind of information that various mass media bring to their audiences' attention is particularly important. Issues highlighted by the media have an indirect impact on the way people think about events and processes they cannot deal with personally.

In the social sciences, the mass media's focus on certain "topics" is commonly referred to as agenda-setting. It should be noted that for the last few decades the term of an agenda has been firmly entrenched in the discourse of scholars working in the field of mass communication. Today, there are more and more articles and monographs, in which numerous aspects of this phenomenon are directly or indirectly analyzed. In our country, practical and theoretical sides of agenda-setting were considered in more detail by the tandem of E. Dyakova and A. Trahtenberg. In addition to those two scholars, Y. and I. Zassoursky, M. Mamonov, E. Vartanova, T. Frolova, M. Shkondin, G. Vychub, G. Kovalev, E. Prokhorov, and other authors also explored various aspects of agendas. Paying tribute to them, it is noteworty that their joint efforts allowed for the formation a holistic view of the essence, mechanisms, and national features of agenda setting in Russia.

Meanwhile, it seems quite interesting to analyze the aspects of agenda-setting that are studied by foreign scholars, and to the extent that their findings are applicable to the Russian media industry. We deem it possible not to pay much attention to the classic ideas of communication science (i.e. W. Lippmann, P. Lazarsfeld, R. Merton, D. McQuial, B. Berelson, J. Horkheimer, E. Katz, J. Klapper, etc.). Instead, we address the researce of Western (predominantly Anglo-Saxon) scholars, who are engaged in the current development of the field.

The main hypothesis of this paper is that approaches to studying agenda-setting, which are widespread among foreign scholars, may be applicable to Russia. This is despite the fact that Russian and Western media function within different social, economic, and political conditions. The agenda-setting theory applies to our country as well.

As for the empirical basis of this research, it should be noted that among an infinite variety of publications devoted to agendas, we have sorted out the twenty-five most quoted articles from the database "Web of Science" (selection of papers was carried out by a keyword search of "agenda" in a category "communication"). Arguably, articles we chose with this method dominate Western communication science (most of these articles' authors are Americans, but some of them are Europeans).

Agenda-setting, framing, and priming

First of all, it is worth noting that in foreign science, agenda-setting is often considered in *conjunction* with or parallel to the processes of framing and priming. Bearing in mind that agenda-setting has diverse connotations in different academic fields, it is necessary to focus more precisely on the definition of agenda-setting. Within the field of mass communication, agenda-setting usually means that mass media emphasize certain issues in their coverage of politics by devoting a greater proportion of the news to them, or by placing them more prominently in the newspaper or newscast. In other words, news selection is at the heart of the agenda-setting process, since the issues that fail to pass through the gatekeepers of media also fail to provide salience cues, relative to other issues, to the audience. This emphasis on specific issues, in turn, influences the salience of these issues among the audience (see, e.g., Kim, Scheufele, Shanahan, 2002).

In addition to making issues more salient, the media also seek to reduce the complexity of issues for the audience by presenting news in simple interpretive packages or frames. Besides reducing complexity, such

frames also serve as interpretive shortcuts, leading audience members to assess responsibility or pass other judgments, based on different frames or interpretations offered by mass media for the same content (see, e.g., Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). In other words, unlike agenda-setting, framing assumes that mass media affect the audience not due to increasing frequency of addressing exact issues, but as a result of putting some terminological or semantic spin on these issues.

As for priming, this process usually implies that agenda-setting leads to the perceived salience of certain issues that directly influences the public's evaluation of political actors (see, e.g., Iyengar, Kinder, 1987). It is argued here that relationships between concepts of agenda-setting, framing, and priming are some of the pivotal themes of Western communication studies.

Some interesting data on the proportion of studies devoted to the phenomena mentioned above can be found in D. Weaver's work. Having counted the overall number of these concepts as keywords in all studies published from 1971 to 2005, this American scholar found a pattern of dramatic growth in framing studies from the first half of the 1990s to the present. There was some modest growth in priming studies, and a leveling off of agenda-setting studies. In 2005, the number of framing studies was four times that of the number of agenda-setting studies. In this sense we see no reason not to agree with Weaver who writes.

"It is not clear why framing has become so much more popular with communication scholars than either agenda-setting or priming in the past 10 years, but it may have something to do with the ambiguity or the comprehensive nature of the term. 'Frame' can be applied to many different aspects of messages and to many different types of messages. It can also be studied by means of systematic content analysis or more interpretive textual analysis alone" (Weaver, 2007).

We notice here that the balance between agenda-setting, framing, and priming studies in Russian communication science is completely different from that of European and American communication science. Without conducting specific research on this matter, we can assume that

there is a slow increase in the number of agenda-setting studies and few to no framing and priming studies in Russia today.

Framing vs. second-level agenda-setting

Turning back to the content of the categories discussed in this paper, it should be noted that there are two main points of view on this issue. According to the first, framing, priming, and agenda-setting are interrelated, but different and independent phenomena. The second approach implies that framing is a natural extension of agenda-setting, in other words, second-level agenda-setting.

Proponents of the first point of view are convinced that agenda-setting comprises content selection as a determinant of public perception of an issue's importance, and indirectly through priming, leads to the evaluation of political leaders. Framing focuses not on which topics or issues are selected for coverage by the news media, but, instead, on the particular ways those issues are presented (Gamson, 1992; Price, Tewksbury, 1997; Scheufele, 2000).

Their opponents believe that the most important thing in terms of mass medias' influence on their audience is selection of an object's attributes. McCombs has suggested that in the language of second level of agenda-setting, "framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed" (McCombs, 1997). He argues that there are many other agendas that convey attributes besides traits of political candidates, and that a good theoretical map is needed to bring some order to the vast amount of diverse frames discussed in various studies. To put it another way, the media coverage of a political candidate may include attributes such as the candidate's positions and qualifications. Media emphasis on such attributes is expected to affect the saliency of the attributes in the public's mind and leads to certain judgments (see, e.g., McCombs, 2004; Weaver, McCombs, Shaw, 2004).

Reconciling these two approaches is possible with the help of an analytical device offered by T. Sheafer. The Israeli scholar supposes that the public's evaluation of issue importance, which is the dependent variable in most agenda-setting studies, is influenced by the issue's saliency in the news, and by the evaluative tone of media coverage (positive, negative, or neutral). This evaluative tone, or affective attribute, attached to the issue is a part of second-level agenda-setting (Sheafer, 2007). In our opinion, the notion of an evaluative tone is therefore a good means of combining the two points of view mentioned above. It does not contradict either the idea of framing as self-sufficient phenomenon, or the theory of second-level agenda-setting.

Moreover, we believe that both framing and second-level agenda-setting theory may well be useful in different cases. Let's imagine a situation in which Russian and American media cover a G8 summit, for example. It is easy to assume that Russian media will stress some aspects within this issue (e.g. discontent of states' leaders with the US surveillance programs), while American media will emphasize other aspects (e.g. negotiations between presidents of the United States and France) within the same issue. In our opinion, this case may be explored with the help of the second-level agenda-setting approach. If we analyze an aspect that is covered by Russian and American media (a dialogue between Presidents Putin and Obama, for example), we would definitely need framing-analysis. American and Russian media would likely spin this issue differently.

Above all, the primary difference on the psychological level between agenda setting and priming, on the one hand, and framing, on the other hand, is thus the difference between whether we think about an issue, and how we think about it. We suppose that framing implies a predominantly "qualitative" influence on audiences, as a result of using certain linguistic techniques. On the contrary, an agenda is set mostly due to a "quantitative" impact on people, i.e. regular coverage of specific issues. Priming may be seen as an outcome of framing and agenda-setting, when events, processes, and persons covered by mass media set specific images in people's minds.

Political, media, and public agendas

In articles selected for analysis much emphasis is also laid on the principles of interaction between different types of agendas, i.e. political, media and public (the latter, in turn, is usually subdivided into personal, interpersonal, and perceived community agendas). There are two kinds of political agendas. The first one — a so-called symbolic agenda — consists of the issues that are attractive to the audience, but at the same time do not have much of a chance for causing political change. Such issues are mentioned by politicians with the express goal of getting into the media. In Russia, the political discourse on democracy, liberal values, and the necessity of fighting corruption may be an example of this kind of political agenda. As a rule, such public talks attract attention, but government action rarely follows. On the contrary, the second kind — a substantial agenda — denotes a number of problems that result in political action, e.g. legislation, resource allocation, and so on (once the President of Russia has said something important, it may well lead to a decree or law). Much of the time the media influence the symbolic agenda, but systematically fail to impact the substantial agenda (Pritchard, Berkowitz, 1993; Walgrave, Van Aelst, 2006).

Special attention is also accorded to the way different types of mass media (i.e. TV, press, radio and the internet) affect each other in the process of setting the agenda. In Western communication science, such interactions are referred to as intermedia agenda-setting (see, e.g., Butler, 1998; Roberts, McCombs, 1994).

An attempt to sketch the broad outline of a preliminary theory of agenda-setting is also worth mentioning. Its authors S. Walgrave and P. Van Aelst think that political agenda-setting is contingent on a number of conditions. The input variables of the model are the kind of issues covered (i.e. obtrusive and unobtrusive), the specific media outlet, and coverage type (i.e. positive, negative, or neutral). Political variables (i.e. elections, institutional rules, internal functions, political configuration, and personal traits) are at the heart of the model.

According to the approach of S. Walgrave and P. Van Aelst, there may be types of output: a fast, symbolic reaction is typical of parliamentary actors, a slow, substantial reaction exemplifies government's reaction to media coverage, and a fast, substantial reaction is confined to strong presidential systems (besides, there may be no reaction at all, or a reaction may be slow and symbolic (Walgrave, Van Aelst, 2006).

In light of such distinctions between political, media, and public agendas, it is noteworthy that there are some terminological subtleties. For instance, as opposed to the Russian tradition, Western scholars believe that agenda-setting means the formation of a strictly public agenda. They argue that the mass media set the public agenda (with regard to unobtrusive issues — i.e. those issues that members of the audience do not deal with in everyday life), and that personal experience also plays a major role in setting some public agendas (regarding intrusive issues — i.e. issues people know about without any information from the mass media) (see, e.g., Scheufele, 2000).

When discussing mass media's capacity to set a public agenda, Western scholars often take into consideration three models. The first one — the public arena model — means that the ability of the public focuses on a single issue for only a limited amount of time due to boredom (Hilgartner, Bosk, 1988; Kingdon, 1995). The second one — the issue-attention cycle model — predicts that public interest in a certain problem will decline as proposed solutions fail (Downs, 1972). Lastly, the third one — let us call it the "It leads when it bleeds" model — implies that graphic presentations of negative events capture the public's attention far more easily than positive developments (see, e.g., Marcus, Neuman, Makuen, 2000; Mutz, 1998).

Turning back to terminological intricacies connected with an agenda in its broadest sense, it should be noted that in the West, the process of forming a media (but not public) agenda is usually termed agenda-building (and not agenda-setting). Agenda-building may actually include all studies that offer an "explanation of why information about certain issues, and not other issues, is available to the public in a democracy"

(Dearing, Rogers, 1996). Empirical agenda-building studies usually concentrate on two major independent variables that affect the media agenda: real-world conditions and events, and the political actions. The first includes analyses of the correlation between changes in real-world indicators and events and the hierarchy of issues in the media agenda. As certain issues culminate, it is expected that the media will accord greater attention to those issues. The second includes the correlation between the agendas or strategies of certain political actors like parties or candidates, and the media agenda (Dearing, Rogers, 1996; Funkhouser, 1973; Behr, Iyengar, 1985).

Agenda-setting and the growing role of the Internet

As for agenda-setting studies, Western scholars place a great deal of importance on the question of the Internet's effects on users' perceptions of the importance of political issues. One of the first attempts to research the Internet's effects on the public's perceived importance of political issues was made in 2002. Having conducted a weeklong experiment in which subjects either read the print version of "The New York Times", the online version, or received no special exposure, S. L. Althaus and D. Tewksbury drew some very interesting conclusions. The American scholars argued that readers of printed newspapers are likely to be exposed to stories that they might not have actively sought out, particularly if those stories appear on the front page. In contrast, online newspapers tend to organize the news into topical categories that draw readers immediately to those stories that most likely to fit their preferences. This tendency limits the chance that online readers will be exposed to the particular stories that a newspaper editorial staff deems important. The reason is that most of the conventional story cues used in printed newspapers (e.g., the exact place an article the spin of a magazine or a newspaper, type size, page proofs, etc.) are not suitable for Web-based newspapers (Althaus, Tewksbury, 2002).

Thus, the Internet's agenda-setting is weaker than that of traditional media. Moreover, as more people consume Internet media, they may develop personal agendas that are different than those developed by print readers. As a result, in our opinion, there is the potential for new technologies to greatly increase the fragmentation of the news audience.

In 2005, the hypothesis stated by S. L. Althaus and D. Tewksbury was partly transformed by K. Schoenbach, E. de Waal, and E. Lauf. The Dutch scholars have carried out a representative survey of almost 1,000 respondents, and made inferences about the impact of online and print media on audiences. They pinpointed that, in fact, both channels contribute to widening the readers' agenda. Though, whereas online newspapers show this effect only in educated society, print versions are able to introduce less-educated readers to new issues (Schoenbach, de Waal, Lauf, 2005).

A possible explanation is that members of educated society may be experienced web users, and thus more familiar with navigating the Internet. They may not need much find information offered online. Instead, they seem to use their time to explore a greater diversity of topics. In addition, this group may be able to narrow its selection processes, and consciously look for a comprehensive overview of what is current events. In contrast, education is irrelevant regarding print media's effect on information selection. The subgroups that learn the most from print newspapers are frequent readers with a below average range of interests, and those with a medium range of interests, who spend more time on reading a print paper (ibid).

Speaking about the Internet, we deem it necessary to note, a gradual change in the roles played by traditional and new media (i.e. Internet news sites, social networks, blogs, podcasts, internet versions of newspapers, magazines, TV channels and radio stations) in influencing Russian public opinion. In practice, this tendency means that new mass media actively take part in public agenda-setting, and deeply affect their audiences (Kazakov, 2013). We think that a scholar should bear this in mind while investigating agenda-setting in Russia.

Last, but not least, is another quite popular aspect of agenda-setting studies, i.e. the role that this phenomenon plays in the field of

international relations, and world politics. In this regard, among twenty-five articles selected for analysis, we have singled out the work of W. Wanta, G. Golan, and C. Lee. Using data from a national poll, and conducting a content analysis of network newscasts, scholars proved that media coverage of foreign nations had also contributed to agenda-setting. Further than that, they drew a number of correlations. For example, the more media coverage a nation received, the more likely respondents were to think that the nation was vitally important to U.S. interests. The more negative coverage a nation received, the more likely respondents were to think negatively about the nation. Positive coverage of a nation had no influence on public perceptions. Neutral coverage led to neutral reactions from the public (Wanta, Golan, Lee, 2004). If it is so, we may conclude that the negative affective attributes showed clear signs of agenda-setting, but positive and neutral spins on the countries did not.

Conclusion

These were main aspects of agenda-setting theories common in American and European communication science. Western communication scholars still conduct the most in depth and diverse agenda-setting studies. Yet, these studies have their limits. First of all, we see no reason not to agree with E. Dyakova and A. Trahtenberg, who pinpointed a so-called "blind spot" of Western agenda-setting theory in its positivist interpretation, i.e. that there is no clear answer to the question of why mass media decide that some issues are worth covering while others are not (Dyakova, Trahtenberg, 2001).

Besides, it is evident that foreign authors often believe that mass media are conventionally functioning within a typically Western liberal-democratic social and cultural context (with its free enterprise, freedom of speech, press, and so on). That is why for some scholars, it is not clear if models, theories, and concepts mentioned in this paper are applicable to societies under different social, economic, and political circumstances, like Russia, for example.

We agree with that Russian and foreign media operate under different social conditions, but also believe that this does not prevent Russian scholars from appropriately using the Western approaches (taking national characteristics into account, to be sure). Arguably, the agenda-setting theory is a kind of prism, which allows scholars to analyze political aspects of interaction between media and society from a different angle.

The reason is that differences between the West and Russia, in our opinion, directly affect only the way mass media select issues. The difference is that the selection process is presumably more or less independent in the West, but under the influence of external circumstances (say, interests of paper's owner, political conjuncture, or acts of political regime) as it reputedly happens in Russia. However, all of this refers mostly to agenda-building, i.e. the process of forming the *media* agenda. As for agenda-setting (i.e. the process of forming the *public* agenda through the mass media's influence on its audiences), we are convinced that there are not many differences between the USA and Europe on the one hand, and Russia on the other hand. Media affect people's minds in more or less the same way. Thus, we may conclude that the approach to agenda-setting discussed in this paper is applicableto Russia too.

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