Survival of the Fittest: Social Media's Influence on the Relationship between Traditional Media and the Public

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Abstract

Despite the innovations and emergence of digital and social media technologies, the influential Agenda-setting theory developed by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972 has remained relatively unchanged. Many analysts still operate under the assumption that the media agenda has a greater influence on the public agenda. With the rise of social media, however, the possibility for reverse agenda-setting needs to be more seriously considered, especially in light of recent events surrounding the Trump University lawsuit, the 2016 presidential election, and the relative success of the #NoDAPL protests. Because of modern technological capabilities in social media, the basic premise of Agenda-setting theory is no longer accurate. This paper serves as a critique of existing theoretical models of Agenda-setting by analyzing recent developments in social media.

The assumption of Agenda-setting theory that media influences the public agenda has become an outdated and inaccurate theory because of innovation within social media platforms. The majority of Americans use social networking platforms, enabling them to post whatever thought comes to mind for friends, family, and strangers alike to view (Perrin, 2015). Two main types of media sources are social media and traditional news media. Traditional news media, typically synonymous with cable news programs, are both older and less interactive than social media platforms found exclusively through internet-accessible devices. Social media platforms have been made available to use at the tip of nearly everyone's fingers through an influx of smartphones (Smith, 2015). Many traditional news sources have adapted to the smartphone by creating different applications (apps) for users to download. However, downloading separate news-source apps can be inconvenient to users due to their device's storage capacity limits. Limited storage and the versatile nature of smartphones lead users to seek that same storage-saving versatility in their apps and are twice as likely to use search engines and aggregators for news consumption (Media Insight Project, 2014). Unlike traditional media, social media platforms have capitalized on this, which is why, as of 2016, 62 percent of American adults receive much of their news from social media platforms (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). In order to adapt to the convenience and efficiency of search engines and aggregators, social media platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat have developed "trending stories." Snapchat, for example, has introduced "Snap-stories," which display news stories and historical events such as the 2016 presidential election and "Live Story" videos collected from the front lines in Iraq (Flynn, 2016). While traditional news mediums have attempted to adapt to the proliferation of digital media, they find that they are less capable of acting as gatekeepers for news information (Nielson & Sambrook, 2016).

Social media, compared to traditional news, has greater influence on the spread of information because it offers direct involvement with current issues (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016; Vu, 2014). Recent examples of the public overpowering and forcing the media to redirect focus via social media includes traditional news networks' attention given to the settlement of the fraud case against Trump University (BBC News, Nov. 2016), the 2016 presidential election

coverage (Confessore & Yourish, 2016), and protests to halt construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline (Rott & Martin, 2016). Because of increased civic engagement through social media, the premise of a media-influenced public agenda is no longer an accurate representation of American society. Whereas communication theorists once argued that mass media set the public agenda, social media consistently proves that this is no longer the case. This paper serves as a critique of existing theoretical models of Agenda-setting through recent developments in social media.

Developments in Agenda-setting Theory

Agenda-setting theory is consistently held as one of the most studied theories of mass communication since its inception with the 1972 Chapel Hill study by Max McCombs and Donald Shaw (Lycarião & Sampaio, 2016). The basic premise of Agenda-setting theory is that mass media influences a topic's salience for the public. According to McCombs and Shaw, the media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think *about*" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 177). In the Chapel Hill study, McCombs and Shaw provided evidence supporting the strong correlation between public and media agendas, concluding that the public agenda was more likely to adopt pronounced issues in the media as a reaction.

The assumption that the public agenda is more likely to adopt issues from the media agenda was best exemplified through the Watergate Scandal in 1972. News sources were integral to keeping the public informed as the Scandal unfolded, particularly the *Washington Post's* journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, whose investigative journalism left a lasting impact on the journalism industry (Giuffo, 2001). By publishing updates on the Watergate Scandal, the *Washington Post* influenced the public agenda. After analyzing events like the Watergate Scandal, McCombs and Shaw determined that every media sensation followed a similar pattern. They developed a formula that accurately depicted the relationship between media and public agenda:

repeated reporting by media sources ➜ public reaction

"Public reaction" does not mean public agreement (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). As seen in the Watergate Scandal, 57 percent of the public thought that Nixon should

be removed from office while 24 percent approved of him even as he resigned on August 8, 1974 (Kohut, 2014). McCombs and Shaw argued that media influences what is discussed, not how it is discussed or the various conclusions the public will infer about the events.

Media, however, is constantly evolving. At the time of the Chapel Hill study, television was controlled by only three channels; researchers reviewed the two largest of the three news broadcasts on different channels owned by different companies, as well as multiple newspapers and news magazines (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In comparison, modern technological capabilities allow for more than three channels to broadcast news and entertainment. According to the United States' Federal Communications Commission, as of November 2016 there are 1,781 full service television stations, as well as the daily creation of new internet websites devoted to both broad and specialized news topics. Additionally, most media outlets are now available to people in the palm of their hands through handheld smart-phones. These inventions and innovations were impossibly far-off to McCombs and Shaw whose initial study helped developed Agenda-setting theory. Nevertheless, Agenda-setting theory was never intended to be static; the theory is designed to be flexible. McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2014) have recently discussed Need for Orientation (NFO) and Agendamelding as two new directions that can be explored relevant to Agenda-setting theory.

NFO is nearly as old as McCombs and Shaw's Chapel Hill study and was first introduced in 1973 by McCombs and Weaver (McCombs & Weaver, 1973). NFO is defined as "a combination of relevance and uncertainty" (McCombs, et al., 2014, p. 784), and posits that traditional news media ought to include informa-tion that is relevant and understood by a particular audience (McCombs & Weaver, 1973). NFO states that to successfully dictate the public agenda, media must take the public's context into consideration. Without taking the public's context into consideration, the information the media provides will be largely irrelevant (Mc-Combs & Weaver, 1973). For example, very few individuals in a suburban neigh-borhood in Indiana are likely to care about food standards in Portugal regardless of how often the media discusses them. Unfortunately, there is little research on NFO and its interaction within Agenda-setting theory. Recent research includes Matthes'

scale, which is based on three dimensions of NFO: "NFO towards an issue; NFO towards specific aspects or frames of an issue; and NFO in regard to journalistic evaluations" (2006, p. 429). Matthes' scale differs from the earlier accepted two dimensions (relevance and uncertainty) by focusing more on relevance, facts of the issue, and the reporting of the issue and facts (Matthes, 2016; Chernov, Valenzuela, & McCombs, 2011). Matthes' scale has since been validated in an experimental comparison of Matthes' three dimensions and earlier two dimensions (Chernov, Valenzuela, & McCombs, 2011). By accounting for how an issue is reported, Matthes' scale acknowledges the importance of the media source as it pertains to traditional media, but it does not explicitly account for messages shared through social media by friends and family or those not included in journalistic evaluations. Despite the shift in dimensions, the primary concept remains that the media must provide information relevant to the public they are targeting.

Similarly, Agendamelding reveals how closely correlated and aligned the public and media agendas are (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014), and is one of the most recent advances in Agenda-setting theory. For the media to be successful in dictating the public agenda, "the correlation between media and public needs to have some reasonable level of agreement" (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014, p. 794). If the media can predict the audience's degree of interest in public issues, then it could tailor its message, which would create a reverse agenda-setting effect. There are two major axes of Agendamelding: vertical and horizontal. Vertical media agenda-setting is that of the civic communities—i.e., it represents all members of those communities. Horizontal media agenda-setting, on the other hand, represents personal communities; it gravitates towards personal interests. For example, 1930s Nazi Germany had a high correlation between public media (vertical axis) and personal media (horizontal axis) due to the firm restrictions on media that punished deviation (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014).

According to McCombs, Shaw, and Weaver (2014), Agendamelding can be condensed into a formula that blends civic community agendas, personal community agendas, and individual interests, experience, and beliefs:

Agenda Community Attraction (ACA)

= Vertical Media Agenda Setting Correlation (squared)

+ Horizontal Media Agenda Setting (squared) + Personal Preferences

The vertical media agenda-setting is the preliminary correlation for the social system correlation being measured. The horizontal media agenda-setting measures the correlation between individuals and more personalized media sources. Horizontal media is impossible to measure because of its breadth of possible sources, but it can be estimated by determining what is not accounted for by vertical media. If both vertical and horizontal media correlations were 1.00, researchers could perfectly predict the salience of issues to the public. Unfortunately, a perfect correlation is untenable since it is difficult to predict public interest (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2014).

More recently, researchers have been exploring the impact digital platforms have had across sub-disciplines of communication and increasingly in setting public agendas (Morgan, Shanahan & Signorielli, 2015; Hyun & Moon, 2016; Jeffres, 2015; Lycarião & Sampaio, 2016). Specifically, Lycarião and Sampaio (2016) have attempted to reimagine Agenda-setting theory as an interactional and cyclical process because of the recent impact and influence of digital communication. Based on results from the 1972 Chapel Hill study, researchers believed that the media influenced the public agenda more often than the public influenced the media agenda (Wu & Coleman, 2009). Today, however, hashtags, memes, videos, and pictures that are instantly sharable and find their way into the mainstream media can go viral and receive coverage on par with "real" news. In 2011, Jaewon Yang and Jure Leskovec tracked social media data (Tweets, blog posts, and news media articles), and their "results hint that the adoption of quoted phrases tends to be much quicker and driven by a small number of large influential sites" (Yang & Leskovec, 2011, p. 185). Thus, if an artifact is easily sharable, it has a greater potential to go viral.

Although Agenda-setting theory has evolved since the Chapel Hill study by developing and expanding with the introduction of NFO and Agendamelding, its premise has remained relatively unchanged. Many analysts still operate under the assumption that the media agenda has a greater influence over the public agenda. The possibility of reverse agenda-setting is not denied by researchers but has not been adequately investigated. Because of modern technological capabilities in social media, the basic premise of Agenda-setting theory is no longer accurate. Thus,

researchers should revisit Agenda-setting theory to determine the extent of the shift of influence between the media and public.

Development in Media

Because media technology is constantly changing and evolving, the Chapel Hill study is no longer an accurate reflection of modern news consumption. Within the past 10 years, more and more people receive news information second-hand through social media platforms on a smartphone application. According to the Pew Research Center, at least 64 percent of American adults owned a smartphone in 2015 (Smith, 2015). Additionally, of those adults, younger adults (ages 18 to 29), those with low household incomes and low levels of educational attainment, and non-whites are more likely to have a higher rate of dependence on their smartphone (Smith, 2015). Smartphone companies quickly adapted existing social media platforms like Facebook onto their operating systems, thus solidifying the smartphone as a tool of connectivity and communication. Additionally, according to a separate Gallup Poll in 2015, 44 percent of Americans upgrade their phones approximately every two years when their cellphone contract expires, while 54 percent of people upgrade their phone when it stops working or becomes obsolete (Swift, 2015). The technological boom turned the luxury item of a personal computer into a commonplace object which grew to connect the world digitally.

Unlike traditional media, social media platforms are not stable entities. Myspace was launched in August of 2003 and was most popular between 2005 and 2008, but it was surpassed by Facebook within a year after Facebook launched publicly in 2006 (Albanesius, 2009). To stay relevant, social media platforms must avoid stagnation. Since 2012, Facebook has updated its code twice a day to be as efficient as possible (Protalinski, 2012). After its boom in popularity from 2008-2009, Facebook has added video and text chat, live video streaming, a "marketplace" for users to sell unwanted items, and different "reactions" beyond just "liking" the post. Platforms such as Myspace and Google+ are not as successful as Facebook because they did not adapt quickly enough, whereas Facebook has continued to grow in popularity because of its willingness to reinvent itself (Albanesius, 2009; Cantil, 2016). Social media platforms must continue to adapt to the ever-evolving audience and user base to avoid becoming irrelevant like Myspace or Google+.

Facebook's level of continued success is currently unprecedented. Other social media platforms, however, have begun competing with Facebook and with each other. Examples of the evolution of social media technology can be seen in the constant introduction of new social media platforms. The first recognized social media site was Six Degrees, introduced in 1997. Six Degrees failed due to inadequate internet infrastructure, poor access to an internet connection, and an unreliable user-base. (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Similarly, in 2001, Ryze—one of the earliest versions of online resume and job application websites—experienced early modest success because it was marketed toward business professionals rather than purely social relationships (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). LinkedIn, however, became more successful than Ryze because of additional features that benefitted companies who used the LinkedIn platform (Boyd & Ellison). Similarly, although Myspace still exists and maintains users, it fell from prominence despite several re-design attempts (Albanesius, 2009). In contrast, Facebook was launched in 2004, made public in 2006, and has remained the most important major social networking platform (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Facebook has maintained its user base for nearly a decade because it has avoided stagnation and obsolescence through constant platform updates. Following Facebook's lead, there has been an explosion of new social media platforms, including Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter. The rise and fall of media platforms, however, also affects traditional media. Traditional media has had to survive by remaining relevant to its existing audience, making itself available through emerging digital platforms, and by adapting to new and younger audiences whose primary form of media consumption occurs through the fluctuation of the social media landscape (Nielson & Sambrook, 2016).

The inevitable adapt-or-die climate for media platforms can be explained through the concept of Technological Convergence. Although researchers have traditionally used Technological Determinism to explain shifts in technology, Technological Convergence provides a more nuanced and accurate explanation of the processes technology and media undergo as they adapt to new audiences. For example, according to Technological Determinism, new media sources are created, mature, and then evolve to survive, while preexisting forms of media must adapt to the emergence of new forms (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-Avigdor, 2004). The natural

life-cycle of inventive and innovated media is comparable to biological functions, such as evolution (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-Avigdor, 2004). A new species (i.e., media invention/innovation) arrives and either competes for resources (i.e., the audience) or fills an empty ecological niche. Technological Convergence, however, complicates the evolutionary analogy by analyzing the changes the new and old media would undergo while competing and/or filling a niche (Lehman-Wilzig & Cohen-Avigdor, 2004). On a broader scale, this phenomenon is observable in the creation of interdisciplinary industries such as information and communication technology (Hacklin & Wallin, 2013). Technological Convergence argues that new media does not simply replace the preexisting media, but by virtue of its adaptations, it forces older forms to change.

More traditional media sources, while having the advantage of being regarded as news-bearers, are not immune to becoming irrelevant as seen through audience consumption according to recent research studies (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016; Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Nielson & Sambrook, 2016). Since the mass production of televisions, individuals have adopted a preference for learning news through a screen such as a television or a computer (Mitchell, et al., 2016). According to the American Press Institute, as of 2014 the overwhelming majority of Americans prefer to consume their news directly from news organizations (92 percent) and through television (87 percent). However, when the same poll was replicated in 2016, preference for receiving news through television fell to 57 percent (Mitchell, et al., 2016). Upon further analysis of 2016 data, there are significant discrepancies of source preference correlated with age. Preference for traditional news platforms (television and print newspapers) is strongest in older audience members while online platforms are strongest with younger audience members (Mitchell et al., 2016). More specifically within online news, social media has become increasingly more popular as an avenue for news consumption. In 2016, 62 percent of American adults received news via social media, an increase from a similar 2012 study which reported only 49 percent (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Facebook is the most prominent social media site, reaching nearly 67 percent of U.S. adults, as well as the leader in social media news with about two-thirds of users getting their news via Facebook (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Market researchers predict that

online news sources, will eventually surpass traditional news sources similar to how television surpassed print news sources (Nielson & Sambrook, 2016). As a result, the power of traditional media to function as news gatekeepers or agenda setters is waning with the consistent rise of new and evolving social media platforms.

One reason social media platforms have drastically altered media, especially news, is that users are directly engaged with each other regardless of distance (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel & Shearer, 2016). They are no longer passive audience members simply reading or watching news being reported. While most adults still commonly share news by word of mouth, sharing news digitally becomes more frequent the easier it can be shared (Mitchell, et al., 2016). Users control the spread of news via their own social media page, which enables every user to act as a commentator. In other words, social media users become news reporters because of the nature of social media communication. Currently, traditional news sources are in the beginning stages of recognizing and adapting to the shift of social media acting as gatekeepers of news by developing their own social media pages across various digital platforms (Nielson & Sambrook, 2016).

A further development in the way social media affects traditional media outlets is the creation of news sources from digital platforms. These types of news sources can be categorized as digital pure players that focus primarily on building an audience to distribute through platforms like Facebook and YouTube (Nielson & Sambrook, 2016). Examples of digital pure players include Occupy Democrats (Nunberg, 2011) and Tomi Lahren (Wendling, 2016). The newsworthiness of digital pure players stems directly from the fact that they exist exclusively on digital platforms. Modern technology has created a digital landscape that would have been unimaginable to the Agenda-setting theory creators in 1972. Researchers, therefore, must account for the new possibilities created by new media platforms and evaluate their consequences in light of the theoretical status quo of Agenda-setting theory.

Implications of Developments

Because of social media's ability to involve the public, traditional media is no longer able to set or control the public agenda because the audience now influences aggregators and algorithms[1] (Vu, 2014). Civic engagement, for example,

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1   Social media relies on aggregators and algorithms that display content personalized for the user based on how the user interacts with prior content.

has increased because users can easily post and respond to online petitions, calls for action, and virtual gatherings to show solidarity and to protest (Yu, 2016). The lack of gatekeeping and increased civic engagement can be seen recently in three specific instances in ascending order of importance: the unsuccessful subconscious over-shadowing of the Trump University court settlement, the direction of presidential campaign issues, and the involvement in protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

On November 18, 2016, President-elect Donald Trump settled the fraud case against Trump University for $25 million, which was reported by BBC News (BBC News, Nov. 2016). That evening, Vice President-elect Mike Pence attended a showing of *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Following the performance, the actor playing Aaron Burr, Brandon Victor Dixon, delivered a message to Pence calling for the future Trump administration to "uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us" (see Mele & Healy, 2016). The next day, on November 19, news stations covered Donald Trump's tweets about the speech to Mike Pence, where he claimed that Pence was "harassed" by the cast; then on November 20, Trump tweeted that the cast and producers "should immediately apologize to Mike Pence for their terrible behavior" (BBC News, Nov. 2016; Mele & Healy, 2016). Despite the popularity of the *Hamilton* incident, Figure 1 demonstrates that the "Trump University settlement" was searched using Google[2] more often than "Hamilton cast to Mike Pence" at their respective peaks on November 19 and 20:
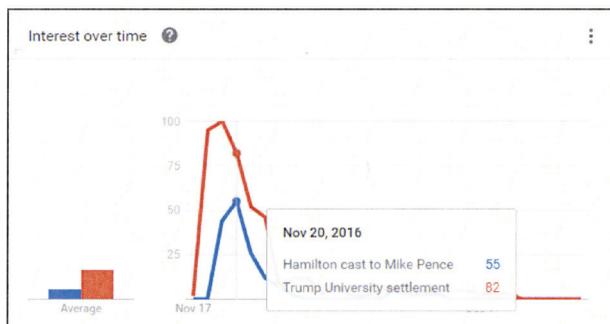

Figure 1: From Google Trends on December 16, 2016

2   Google, Inc. provides information on the relative frequency of terms searched on Google search engine. Individuals can go to https://www.google.com/trends/ and enter any term(s) into the "Explore topics" search bar and the frequency relative to its peak and duration of Google searches of the specific term(s), punctuation and capitalization included, will be created in either a line or Cartesian graph depending on the amount of terms searched.

In addition to a general Google search, Fox News and CNN coverage of both events were also examined because of their documented partisan biases (Weatherly, Petros & Christopherson, 2007). When searching the Fox News results using "Trump University settlement site:foxnews.com" on Google, 571 results appear (see Appendix). In contrast, when searching the Fox News results using "Hamilton cast site:foxnews.com" on Google, 3,560 results appear (see Appendix). A similar disparity occurs on CNN's website: 1,620 results appear for "Trump University settlement site:cnn.com," while 3,590 results appear for "Hamilton cast site:cnn. com" (see Appendix). While not as prominent on CNN, both conservative and liberal biased media appear to have endeavored to overshadow the Trump University fraud case, thus attempting to influence the public agenda. Despite Fox News's and CNN's attempt to set the public agenda regarding the presidential election, the controversy surrounding the Trump University fraud settlement was searched more because it was trending on social media (BBC News, Nov. 2016; Holt, 2016). In this instance, the premise of a media-controlled agenda failed. Although the media did not actively attempt to withhold information, the incident supports the notion that traditional media no longer has a monopoly on setting public agendas since digital media allows for a broader dissemination of information.

The media failing to influence the public agenda is not an anomaly anymore. Throughout the Presidential election, Donald Trump received a nearly endless amount of free attention because of his Twitter account (Confessore & Yourish, 2016). Trump used Twitter as a platform and it received daily coverage. His Twitter posts received mention in both the Republican primary and Presidential debates (see Federal News Service, 2016 for transcript). Donald Trump effectively set the election agenda through social media. His constant use of buzz words like "Crooked Hillary" and "Make America Great Again" would receive more favorites and retweets on average than standard campaign rhetoric (Mitchell, Holcomb, & Weisel, 2016). Because of his effective use of Twitter, Trump controlled the media agenda, which attempted to control the public agenda. Building on Trump's aggressive rhetoric toward Hillary, news outlets devoted 19 percent of Clinton's coverage to varying controversies. Overall, no less than 7 percent of total weekly coverage focused solely on varying facets of email scandal allegations. Trump's media coverage

allotted only 15 percent of coverage to controversies including but not limited to the Trump Foundation, unreleased tax returns, avoiding federal taxes, system rigging allegations, and sexual misconduct (Patterson, 2016). When examining social media sentiment in July 2016, from a sample size of 28,131 Trump mentions, 8,113 (28.84 percent) were negative as opposed to Clinton's sample of 25,186 mentions which resulted in 5,721 (22.71 percent) negative sentiments (DeMers, 2016). Synthesizing his Forbes article, DeMers notes that while the media tried to push an agenda that devoted more time to Clinton controversies, the public focused more on Trump's shortcomings (DeMers, 2016). This resulted from increased social media usage, providing almost everyone from presidential candidates to interested citizens a platform to voice their own opinions as well as engage with opposing views on a larger scale rather than interpersonally discuss agreements or disagreements based on media opinion.

The #NoDAPL movement is the most important example of the three recent events because it displays the growing influence of reverse agenda-setting. The Dakota Access Pipeline Project is an attempt to build a pipeline approximately 1,172 miles to connect and transport crude oil from Bakken and Three Forks production areas in North Dakota to refineries in Patoka, Illinois. The project was announced publicly on June 25, 2014, and landowners along the intended pipeline route were provided informational hearings between August 2014 and January 2015. Construction began early 2016 and was halted on December 4, 2016 on executive order by President Obama, but construction resumed January 24, 2017 under executive order by President Trump. The largest reported controversies surrounding the project involved potential environmental hazards and infringement on sacred Native American territory (BBC News, Aug. 2016). Protests of the pipeline began with the construction, largely to protect Native American sovereignty, specifically of local Sioux tribes (Martin, 2016). Sacred Stone Camp was established in April 2016 by a Standing Rock Sioux elder within the Standing Rock Indian Reservation as an act of protest. It was not until September 2016 that mainstream media began to provide significantly more coverage due to bulldozing of documented historic and sacred land and the violent retaliations of protestors by site security and militarized police spreading across social media platforms (Manning, 2016; Silva, 2016; BBC News,

Aug. 2016). The increase in public attention is further corroborated when examining Google web search trends of "#NoDAPL" (the most commonly recognized reference for the Dakota Access Pipeline protest). Figure 2 shows that #NoDAPL's initial peak lasted between September 4-10:

Interest over time

100
75
50
25

Sep 4 - Sep 10 2016

#NoDAPL   38

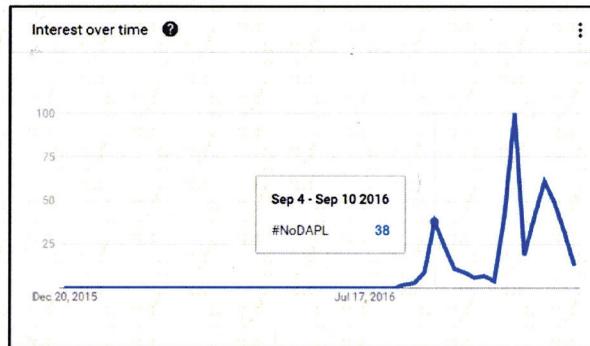Dec 20, 2015   Jul 17, 2016

Figure 2: #NoDAPL search trends retrieved from Google Trends December 16, 2016

Beyond just searching for #NoDAPL information, individuals unable to journey to Sacred Stone Camp took part in protests via social media, specifically Facebook. As an act of solidarity, Facebook users encouraged one another to "check in" at Standing Rock Indian Reservation (Kennedy, 2016). During the "check in" protest, #NoDAPL reached its highest salience as shown in Figure 3:

Interest over time

100
75
50
25

Oct 30 - Nov 5 2016

#NoDAPL   100

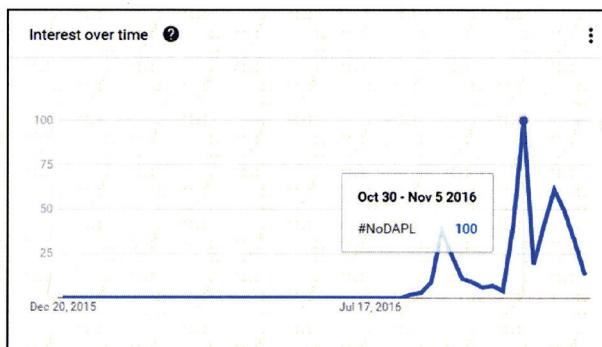Dec 20, 2015   Jul 17, 2016

Figure 3: #NoDAPL search trends retrieved from Google Trends December 16, 2016

#NoDAPL did not obtain national attention until it began to trend on social media platforms, which inevitably helped set the agenda for traditional media. As a result, the reverse-agenda setting success of #NoDAPL demonstrates the potential influence social media will continue to exhibit as digital technologies improve and become more prevalent within society.

Conclusion

As recent events have shown, Agenda-setting theory as it currently exists requires important modifications. The Trump University settlement versus Hamilton cast and the 2016 presidential election media coverage displayed that the media was unsuccessful in directing the public's attention to and from certain issues. Similarly, the #NoDAPL movement displayed social media's power to influence the media's agenda. These three events are not unique or isolated from each other; they happened within the same year and had a significant impact on public discourse.

Like traditional media sources, media studies that rely on Agenda-setting theory should evolve alongside the changing media landscape. The popularity and ubiquity of social media has reached unprecedented levels of influence, and it perpetually modifies itself to remain interesting and relevant to users (Albanesius, 2009). Because of these innovations in media and technology, the processes of determining and delivering news to the public by traditional news outlets are permanently altered and are subjected to future innovations and adaptations. Thus, the assumption that traditional media is more influential in setting the public agenda is outdated and should be revised to more accurately represent the dynamism new media innovations have on news consumption.

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Appendix

Screenshots of Compared Search Terms from Fox News and CNN

All screenshots in Figure 4 were retrieved on December 16, 2016. I obtained these by typing the quoted phrases into Google search engine and documented the results. I used the terms "Trump University settlement" and "Hamilton cast" as broad subject terms to have access to all relevant news articles and broadcast clips from specified sources. I limited the site each time by "site:" to only search on the news networks' official sites.
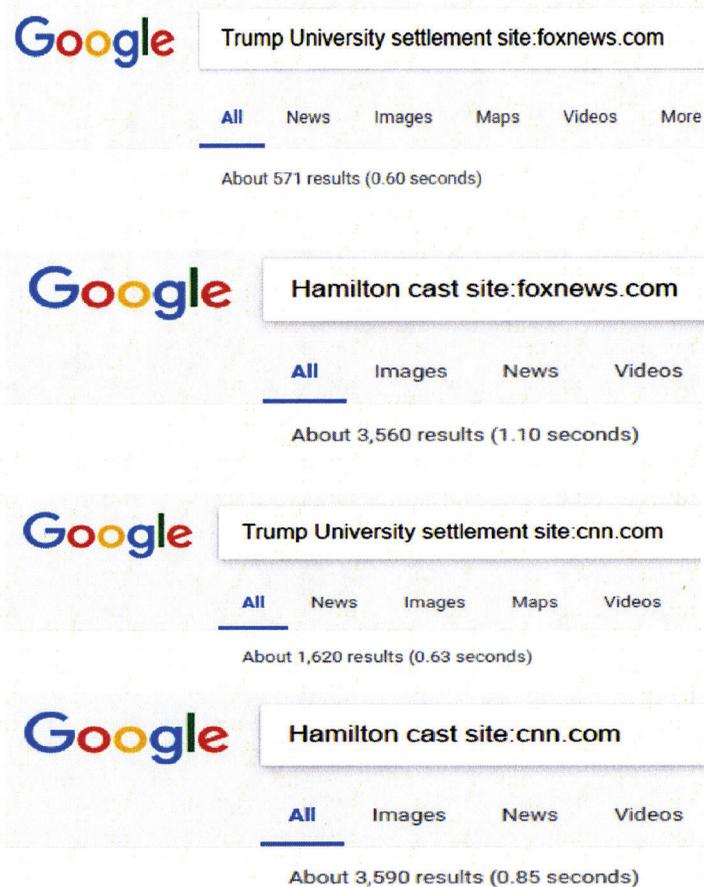

Figure 4: Search term comparisons retrieved December 16, 2016