

## Research Article

# THE SHAPING OF PUBLIC OPINION: AGENDA SETTING IN THE UNITED STATES 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

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### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** This study aims to investigate the hidden biases of the American Media during the electoral 2016 presidential campaign. The research aspires to bring potential readers as close as possible to some controversial practices that shout for the shaping of the American public opinion. **Study design:** A case study of the 2016 presidential campaign. It includes both quantitative and qualitative data with sections of analysis. **Place and Duration of Study:** Doctoral Studies Center (CEDOC) at Sultan Moulay Slimane University, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, Béni Mellal, Morocco. Doctoral Program: Interactions in Literature, Language, Culture and Society (ILLCS) between November and December 2022. **Methodology:** The study relies on a progressive methodology starting with an introductory section, then a review of the existing literature mainly by focusing on McCombs & Shaw. The other sections are dedicated to the exposition of various data and their analysis in the light of Agenda Setting Theory. **Results:** The research shows a clear manipulation in the way of handling news via different channels and platforms to serve the audience a prepared version that aims to shape public opinion to favorize a candidate over another. **Conclusion:** An impetus of honesty suggests mentioning that although agenda setting is an acclaimed theory based on scientific qualitative and quantitative studies that keep evolving every year it is yet still not perfect.

**Keywords:** Agenda Setting, Media, Election, Presidency, Foreign Policy.

### INTRODUCTION

In any nation, elections are the most expressive form of democracy that aims to select a candidate that will represent the people and fight for their interests. Electoral campaigns are a democratic process based on a simple principle where candidates compete to be elected by citizens who vote for them. The candidate that ends up with the majority of votes is democratically elected. The purpose of any electoral campaign is to inform the public about the issues that the candidate will address after the elections and show his or her political party's planning to solve problems that are in the hotspot of actuality. Also, campaigns use media as their main vehicle to communicate with voters and motivate them to massively participate which grants the final results a high level of credibility and thus more authority and legitimacy to the winning party in future decision-making instances.

"Traditional democratic theory holds that campaigns inform citizens, offer them clear and distinct choices between candidates on the issues, and motivate them to participate in elections. Voters are expected to respond to the information they receive from campaigns and cast their ballots for the candidate who most directly addressed their concerns" (Dewey. 1954).

This seems to be the ideal situation where everything runs as normal but in reality, the debate over electoral campaigns has raised numerous questions about what is politically correct in 'provoking' a citizen to vote in the favor of one candidate over another and how media influence in very sophisticated ways the perception of voters and how it can alter public opinion to favor a candidate or another. Agenda Setting theory is used to cast light on some controversial practices in the political domain that tend to favorize an issue and put a strong focus on it to grant it more importance. The theory also asserts that the news media is of a great influence over public perception by determining what is important in stressing and covering

certain issues more than others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.176) and thus make them climb the trends in media and especially in social media as the latter has been proven to hold the potential of being of a tremendous influence among the public. The last United States presidential campaign is certainly not an exception regarding the use of strategic agenda setting paradigms to shape public opinion over issues that are implicitly manipulated to have greater importance than others. The road to the white house and the oval office is not paved with roses. In fact, the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign between Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton was an open battlefield where Mass Media played a central role in this pitiless fight for the ultimate seat of power. The purpose of this paper is to uncover some facets of Agenda Setting use in the 2016 U.S presidential campaign to clarify how the dynamics of media power by the use of agenda setting shaped the social and political landscape that framed these elections.

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In *Framing Public Life* (2010), McCombs, Maxwell E., and Salma I. Ghanem define Agenda Setting as a theory about the transfer of salience from the mass media's pictures of the world to those in our heads (p. 67). This theory is a practical process where Mass Media is involved in shaping framing and directing public opinion and thought. In this brief literature, the aim is to explore the agenda setting principles and more precisely how it makes use of the Media to affect public opinion to serve political interests. The purpose also aims to highlight the theoretical foundations in addition to shedding light on a brief history that traces the premises of the theory and its major assumptions. To catch a glimpse of the essence of Agenda Setting Theory, Bernard Cohen (1963) advances that if 'we' as an audience do not see a story in the newspaper or catch it on the radio or television, it simply did not happen as far as we are concerned (p.13). This statement is a testimony that shows how media became the only reliable source of information and how it stood as the one and only

trusted link between audience and information. Cohen also points out that:

"the press 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. The world will look different to different people, depending not only on their personal interests, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers of the papers they read." (p.13)

The press in this regard does not only stand as a smart conveyer of information but is also portrayed as a tool, a political tool used by writers, editors, and publishers, as ordained by decision-makers to tell audience what to think about by selecting a set of news, claimed to be worthy of all attentions. The consequences of such practices are seen in the social landscape where agenda setting use in media creates debates and controversies that result in major changes in public policy such as voting for new laws or even choosing the nation's next leader. Agenda Setting as we know it today has roots in Walter Lippmann's analysis of shaping public opinion through images back in 1922 in his Pulitzer prize-winning classic *Public Opinion*. Lippmann gives in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter "*The World Outside and The Pictures In Our Heads*" an overview of how media stands as the only medium between events that happen in the world and the images that people have in their minds about those events (pp. 9-27). Such a depiction of the media constitutes an early definition of the upcoming contemporary term of Agenda Setting. The limited judgment of the audience towards events as being reported by Mass Media creates a delusive image of the world and this hazardous combination of reporting/receiving is the foundation of today's Agenda Setting Theory. Average voters that constitute most of the voting population in any nation tend to have their information about political matters such as candidates, parties, economic road maps, campaigns, and international issues through Mass Media. Not all voters are subject to change their pre-established opinions about those matters by the way they were presented by media, but they all meet one simple standard; they all acquire their knowledge through structured news coverage despite the medium. Journalism is of prime interest concerning what lies behind Agenda Setting as it is often at the center of a polemic debate about whether the news is intended to inform or to persuade. This ethical question is usually answered by journalists as not founded because the work of a journalist must be objective even when it concerns matters of listing pros and cons and "phrases such as 'what people need to know' and 'the people's right to know' are rhetorical standards in journalism" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p.4). With all these concerns on the rise, common sense requires a methodical analysis of news reception to detect Agenda Setting mechanics in play.

Agenda Setting in news media is not to be taken as an absolute power that reaches its goals every time it is deployed. History retains the magistral failure of the news agenda in covering Monica Lewinsky's affair with President Clinton in the 1998 widely known scandal. The US public opinion stood against the unprecedented massive coverage of the affair by the news and knew how to make a difference between a personal matter and the ability of President Bill Clinton to govern and run the country. Presidential elections have been occasions for scholars and researchers to attempt decoding biased choices in news coverage, but the methods used were blurry and often came with mitigated conclusions. This was the case until 1972 when Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw established the Agenda Setting theory as a scientific approach in their 1<sup>st</sup> article "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media". They investigated the news coverage of the 1968 presidential elections and concluded that media shapes the public agenda by selecting and providing news and thus putting in the foreground a set of issues to think about and not

necessarily driving audiences on how to think about them. They have also established a relationship between what audiences believe to be important issues and what issues were related by the media. Their conclusions showed a significant impact on the voters by establishing an irrefutable correlation between what voters consider major issues and their respective coverage time and insistency exerted by the media. McCombs and Shaw claim that:

"In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but also how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position. In reflecting what candidates are saying during a campaign, the mass media may well determine the important issues—that is, the media may set the "agenda" of the campaign" (p.176).

Agenda Setting as advocated by McCombs and Shaw has also moral assumptions. It aims to raise awareness regarding the manipulative hidden intentions of the media by stressing the fact that the latter does not portray faithful reality but shapes and frames it into something crafted backstage. It also denounces the intentional exaggeration of coverage time of certain issues more than others which grants them more importance and thus makes them more visible to the general audience.

## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND INTERPLAY IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN THE U.S

The 2016 electoral U.S. campaign is all but conventional. Never in the history of the United States has a run for president of the U.S. been so divisive. The final result is stunningly unexpected for many because the winner is simply Donald J. Trump, a highly controversial popular figure and a typical perturber in the American political scene. The controversy comes from the fact that Donald Trump does not have the profile of a typical politician. He is a businessman and an estate tycoon established in New York where he runs a huge intercontinental diversified business and commerce. He also starred in the reality TV show *The Apprentice* where contestants compete for a job as an apprentice to billionaire American Donald Trump who judges their abilities and competencies and determines whether or not they deserve to work for him (*The Apprentice*. IMDb). This situation is unprecedented in the U.S and raised concerns among a large number of politicians especially when votes declared Trump as a final win against the former first lady and secretary of state Hillary Clinton who can be easily considered a perfect fit as the first American woman to become the 45<sup>th</sup> United States' president. Some analysts attribute the winning of Donald Trump to his fiery temper in running a widely mediatized populist campaign where he rises emotions in addressing a fragile stratum of American citizens by promising that America is going to be 'great again' under his administration.

In a Q&A between journalist John Gramlich and Michael Dimock, president of Pew Research Center, a question about the polling failure in predicting the 2016 result is raised:

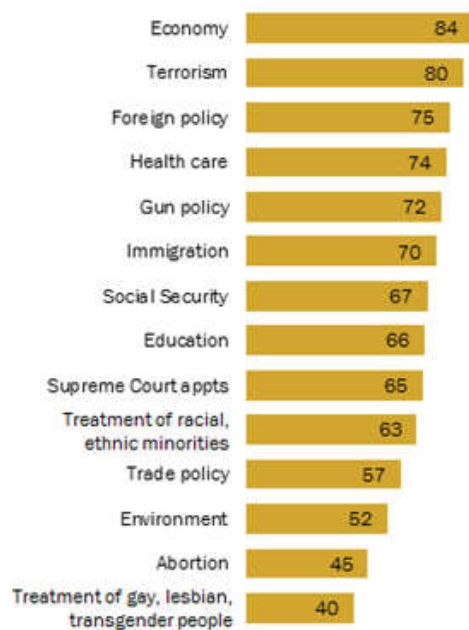
Q: There's a widespread feeling that polling failed to predict the 2016 election results. Do you agree?

A: President Trump's victory certainly caught many people by surprise, and I faced more than one Hillary Clinton supporter who felt personally betrayed by polling. But the extent to which the expectation of a Clinton victory was based on flawed polling data – or incorrect interpretation of polling data – is a big part of this question. (Gramlich, J. *Pewresearch*)

The answer of Mr. Michel Dimock shows how misled the experts' predictions about the outcome of the 2016 elections are despite having enormous amounts of collected data. Even though Clinton was favored by predictions, Trump won the elections making everyone reconsider his/her opinions about him as an intruder in the high spheres of politics. In an attempt to understand more precisely why the majority of Americans voted for Trump instead of Clinton, special attention should be driven toward the key issues that were at the center of the interest of American voters. Pew Research Center spent a considerable effort in gathering data and listing the top issues that decided American votes in the 2016 elections.

### Economy and terrorism are top issues for voters in 2016

% of registered voters saying each is "very important" to their vote in 2016 ...



Note: Based on registered voters. Q40.  
Source: Survey conducted June 15-26, 2016.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fig. 1. Percentage of top voting issues in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections (Pewresearch).

The figure above provides an accurate explanation of why Donald Trump is crowned as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States of America. The top two issues as mentioned by the Pew Research Center are the economy and terrorism, two hot trending topics in Trump's campaign. Trump directed his focus on the U.S. economy as the most urgent issue to handle to 'make America great again' in allusion to the resurrection of the dying American dream. Terrorism is also an undeniable hotspot in recent years, widely covered by the media, it stands as a game changer in voting dynamics. Trump made clear that his war on terrorism is going to be radical with zero tolerance and proved to have in his sleeves some drastic measures towards 'terrorism exporting' countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Foreign policy may seem to be the domain of expertise of Hillary Clinton and that is right as she has a great deal of experience in politics and was nominated as the United States Secretary of State, a high-ranked position in the federal government where her main concern is foreign policy. The contrast between Trump and Clinton in dealing with foreign policy is very sharp and most of the time very contradictory. Clinton is more tolerative and calls for diplomatic approaches in handling external affairs whereas Trump is far more

aggressive and very radical concerning foreign policy. He publicly stated during his campaign that he will ultimately build a border wall between the United States and Mexico and make Mexicans pay for it, a blatantly laughable claim that turned out to be a serious engagement in his campaign. Also, Trump promised to get rid of internal corruption in Washington DC that allows foreign countries to flood American markets with goods without paying suitable taxes and he called this stand-alone crusade against internal corruption "drain the swamp". This Trumpist attitude is what makes the anti-trump clan furious and makes them question if Trump's administration will ever know what the ethical borders are. In a Los Angeles Times article, journalist Scott Martelle fires back by stating that "For a politician (and yes, Trump is one) who won election in part by promising to drain the swamp, Trump (who has his own overstuffed bag of conflicts) seems more like the swamp keeper". (LATimes). What to be taken into consideration is that, unlike Clinton, Trump is a perturbator that knocks out conventional political established rules which makes him a potential media sensation in a world avid for novelty and ready to get rid of old stereotypes. Hillary Clinton on the other hand is more concerned with 'domestic' issues such as health care, gay and LGBT rights, women's rights, and fair taxation systems. These issues are not denuded of interest, but they are not the hot subject that the media covers and dedicates a great deal of news time to. Moreover, the addressees are often educated, with university degrees or intellectuals and doctors that constitute a minority compared to the large chunk of the population that is more concerned with issues raised by trump who addresses mainly white voters with no university degree and often with low income. Trump's advisors also linked the name of Clinton to a series of scandals and a history of misconduct and corruption, the last scandal that was widely reported by the media during the time of the presidential campaign is the suspicious use of Hillary's e-mail server during her time as secretary of state. An F.B.I. investigation was conducted to elucidate the matter. Dom Calicchio a Fox News reporter and a journalist reported that Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server was among the 'gravest' offenses to transparency. He also added that "President Trump and Republicans have repeatedly slammed Clinton's use of the private email server, arguing in part that the practice potentially placed classified government information at risk" (Dom Calicchio, Fox News). This incident shows the raging war and below-the-belt hits that media can engage in regarding political matters, especially in the United States.

### AGENDA SETTING DYNAMICS IN THE UNITED STATES 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The major concerns of a country and the issues of importance to its population bring a competitive environment to any election. In this special unstable political ground, each party brings into focus issues that are strategically determined to set up its agenda. The agenda has amongst its goals to define criteria upon which voters build their decision. Political parties in the U.S. establish their election-running identities by adopting or 'owning' different issues that they judge more relevant to voters and the least to say about this strategy is that it is highly risky and can put any campaign into jeopardy during the race. Time allowed by law for presidential campaigns in the U.S. is a limiting factor that forces parties to choose a reasonable set of issues that are judged of paramount importance instead of having all interesting ones into consideration at once. This selective procedure helps greatly in establishing the media agenda that can oil up its mechanisms to fashion audiences to fit into the mold shaped by decision-makers. This does not mean parties are obligated to adopt completely different issues; they can deal with the same issues, but what is relevant to the general public is their positions and opinions concerning these issues. In this regard, Manfred J. Holler and Peter

Skott state that “Parties and politicians become identified with certain positions and cannot, without loss of credibility and trustworthiness, change these positions opportunistically”. (p. 4). Agenda Setting selective mechanisms and also its declaration of position regarding issues in presidential campaigns is a double-edged kind of game that can be revealed as a principal determinant in winning or losing an election. Marcus Berliant and Hideo Konishi in their journal article “Salience: Agenda Choices by Competing Candidates” state that “Announcing positions on such issues can be dangerous. If voters happen to be against a candidate’s announced position and they feel very strongly about the issue, the he/she may lose the election only because the announcement on this issue” (p. 130).

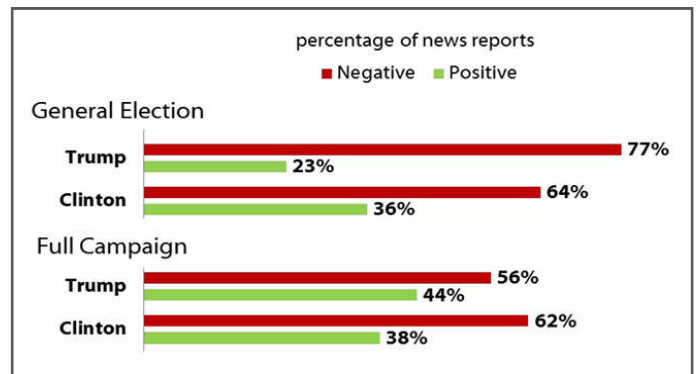
**Media Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Campaign**

Media as has been stated is the main medium of information between a candidate and the voters. In 2016, American media was the epicenter of the informing process about the presidential elections by providing a large number of potential voters with a plethora of news ranging from statistics through political positions regarding important issues to the candidates’ personal lives. During this delicate period where the future of the country is to be decided, the media was not an adjuvant to any of the two candidates. It was reported that a significant percentage of news coverage was biased. Instead of focusing on support, most of the American media vehiculated a huge deal of negativity in their coverage of the two campaigns. Media has been proven also to neglect covering important issues and general policies of the competing parties and focuses vigorously on the two candidates Donald Trump as a derogatory outsider and Hilary Clinton as a corrupt figure. Thomas E. Patterson, a Brad lee Professor of Government and the Press wrote a very interesting article on how American media covered the presidential elections in 2016 that was published on Harvard Kennedy School’s website. He states that:

“A new report from Harvard Kennedy School’s Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy analyzes news coverage during the 2016 general election and concludes that both Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump received coverage that was overwhelmingly negative in tone and extremely light on policy”. (Thomas E. Patterson. *Shorenstein Center*)

In his analysis of the negative bias exerted by the news reports during the elections, professor Patterson in his aforementioned study showed also that Hilary Clinton was attacked abundantly by the American press. In the same manner, statistics stressed the fact that what proof. Patterson qualifies as ‘bad press’ outpaced Clinton’s ‘good press’ by 64 percent to 36 percent. He also added that “She was criticized for everything from her speaking style to her use of emails”.

Trump also suffered from the press’ negative bias. In reality, Trump fired at the press by claiming that journalists are deliberately unobjective in their approach to the presidential election in favoring Hilary Clinton and engaging in ferocious sabotage against him and his campaign.

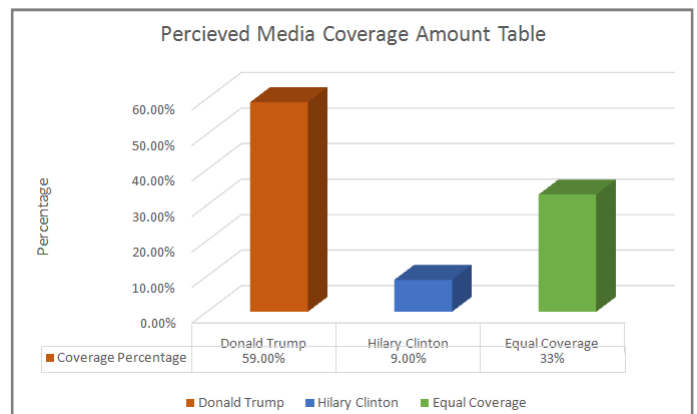


**Fig. 2. Tone of Nominees’ Coverage by media in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections (Shorensteincenter.org).**

As shown in the figure above, Trump also had his share of negative press. The study put into evidence that he was plagued with 77 percent negative press to 23 percent positive which means that the American press was far from being Trump-friendly.

In a more objective media coverage analysis, Angela Jean Caulk from Iowa State University mentioned in her master’s dissertation a survey conducted on February 15, 2017, by a private platform under the name of Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The survey as she mentioned “provided empirical data to show that the themes and frames ....affected what voters found important”. The results of this survey were judged important to mention in this paper because they proved to be representative of the majority of voters and in accordance with the outcome of the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. Below is a table that shows the perceived amount of media coverage despite of being biased or not as it was collected by the survey that concerned a population of 357 participants

**N.B:** For detailed information about the participants please refer to the dissertation. (pp. 34-35)



**Fig. 3. Perceived Media Coverage Amount (Caulk, Angela Jean).**

Figure 3 shows that 59% of the survey sample population believe Donald Trump benefited from more media coverage than Hilary Clinton whereas only 9% of them felt that le latter had greater media coverage and 33% perceived that both contenders had equal coverage in the media. In her dissertation, *Angela* states that this result is a second-level media agenda setting that confirms the first-level media agenda setting that “portrayed Trump as the most important candidate in the 2016 presidential race” (p. 11). She also mentions that “First-level agenda setting emerged through the importance that media placed on Trump by the amount of coverage they provided him. Second-level agenda setting came to light through the spread of populist messaging (p. 25). Her claims corroborate what



has already been mentioned in this paper about Trump being a candidate carrying a populist discourse that targets low-income citizens and workers that constitute the demographic majority of the United States that is more interested in issues developed by Trump than those addressed by his opponent. Media roles switched over time from objectively reporting news in a raw form and simply informing or educating audiences to a more subjective role where they have to create a tendency and trending hot issues by framing the content even if they cross ethical boundaries to shape audiences into believing what they see on cable TV and networks is the most relevant.

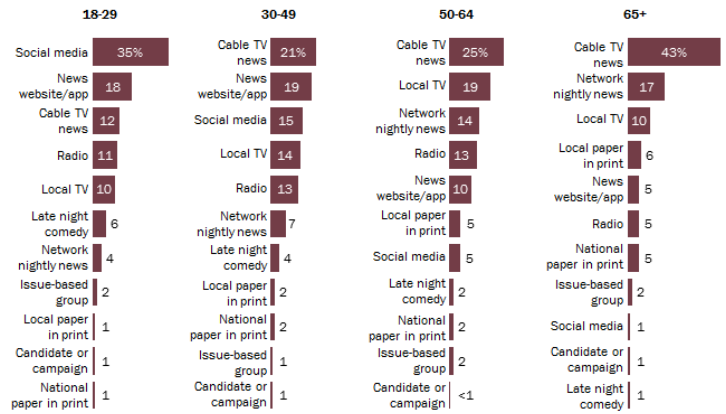
A quick coverage result analysis shows why the media was covering more Trump than Clinton and as a logical conclusion more Trump issues than Clinton's. It was because the Clinton family had a long history of scandals at both political and personal levels which made the American citizens accustomed to and somehow fed up with such stories to the level that they were no more interested in hearing about them in the news. The media also developed an obsession with Trump as an unprecedented political novelty as he was the first candidate for the presidency of the United States to ever formulate very radical and highly controversial claims about sensitive issues such as immigration, terrorism, and foreign policy. Some media analysts see that this kind of media obsession and the high coverage rate are behind making Trump ubiquitous in every media form allowing him by inadvertence to ultimately win his race to the white house.

**Social and Digital Media Involvement in the 2016 Presidential Campaign**

Social Media differs from mainstream classical media on so many levels. Social media apps such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are user-based platforms that allow interactions between subscribers from all horizons to comment and discuss topics of actuality in a very low-controlled environment. Media corporations are aware of the enormous potential that social media offers in terms of reaching billions of users easily. Giant media corporations such as CNN, FOX, and CNBC have active accounts on these platforms where they can inform, give complements of information, express informal positions or raise topics of discussion. This later activity complements their biased media agenda by spreading hot issues to a much wider range of users which grants social media a heavy weight of impact. If a single word is to be chosen to qualify social media it would be 'brief', brief posts, brief tweets, brief messages, and brief comments. These politics of short and quick go in harmony with the pace of the modern world. Unlike TV news, users of social media are constantly bombarded with fresh news and actualizations every minute. Information is selling like cakes. Media corporations exist also in digital forms by building their websites and developing their applications accessible via numerous Operating Systems like Microsoft's Windows, Google's Android, and Apple's IOS. The tendency to rely upon digital content to be informed is proven to be correct as research by Amy Mitchell and other researchers from Pew Research Center has concluded.

**About a third of 18- to 29-year-olds name social media as most helpful type of source for learning about the 2016 presidential election**

Among those who learned about the 2016 presidential election in the past week, % who say the most helpful type of source is ...



Source: Survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016  
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

**Fig. 4. Percentage by Preferred Source of Information and by Age Classification**

according to the survey conducted Jan. 12-27, 2016, using Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel. (Pew Research Center's Journalism Project).

Political parties understood that their campaigns should be brought online where the battle is more direct, and the hits cause more pain. Agenda setting in these new forms of media is also heavily present and biased information is inescapable. Also, it is worth mentioning that conventional Media and New Media forms are not completely separate entities. A. Conway, Kate Kenski, and Di Wang conducted research that showed a correlative interplay between the two major sources of information and also the dynamics of incorporating social media in the campaign package. Twitter was considered a representative of social media because of its presumable salience among politicians and its wide use in the American landscape. In this research, a complex relationship between traditional and new media emerged. The research states that:

“findings during the 2009 German election suggest that overall Twitter and traditional media follow a different “logic,” but this was not the case when it came to the leading candidates. With high-profile individuals and events, Twitter may play a role similar to that of traditional news media, functioning more like a news outlet than a social one” (Conway, Bethany A., et al.)

Taking this statement into consideration, it becomes clear that when engaging with high-profile individuals like Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton, Twitter functions as any regular traditional media form and consequence vesiculate the same agenda-setting by stressing on a selected set of issues or reserving a great deal of coverage on one candidate to the detriment of the other as was shown earlier in this paper. In the same manner, the table below shows that the most impactful influencers on Twitter during the 2016 presidential elections were either the news agencies or the candidates themselves; the numbers of followers are self-explanatory.

Media Outlet	Consumption
@CNNPolitics	427K followers
@nprpolitics	1.96M followers
@realclearnews	63.8K followers
@HillaryClinton	5.41M followers
@realDonaldTrump	6.2M followers
MSNBC – Primetime television	525K viewers

(Gold 2015)	
Fox News – Primetime television (Gold 2015)	1.65M viewers
CNN – Primetime television (Gold 2015)	576K viewers

**Fig. 5. Number of Followers or Viewers for Media Outlets and Political Candidates.**

(Smith, Jacob D., Political priming and agenda setting in Twitter for the 2016 presidential election)

If conclusions are to be drawn, agenda-setting becomes more straightforward as the candidates themselves are involved directly in choosing what issues to cover instead of relying on traditional mediums. Trump and Clinton gather a staggering amount of 11.5 plus million followers which dwarfs all the other accounts combined. It can also be noted that Trump with 6.2 million followers is ranked in the leading position concerning the number of followers add to that the time allowed to him in the traditional news as seen earlier granted his campaign a tremendous amount of visibility despite being negative or positive allowing him by the same way a bigger space of expression.

## CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper raised an alarming account of facts ranging from the dangerous implications of agenda setting in the media and its impact in shaping a distorted world in the minds of audiences exposed without their conscious consent to a set of pre-framed issues put into salience deliberately to the implication of digital and social media in the political sphere and how they follow the traditional media forms in their framing labor. The paper also provided the theoretical framework used in analyzing the questions of agenda setting used in the 2016 presidential campaigns of both Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton starting from the premises and early forms of the agenda setting theory advocated by Walter Lippmann in his book *Public Opinion* and ending with its final and more refined form developed by theorists McCombs, Maxwell E., and Donald L. Shaw that brought into light how issues salience in the media could ultimately shape their opinions. Context and Background interplay in the 2016 Presidential Elections in the U.S. were also examined for the sake of having a minimum of global information concerning this special presidential marathon. Some of the most worth mentioning about these elections is the fact that Clinton is the first woman ever to apply for the American presidency whereas Donald Trump stood as the most controversial political figure to ever win the elections. It was also mentioned that issues promised to be handled by trump had more importance among the voters impacted by his shocking ways of speaking and his very daring manners in treating issues. Also, the paper showcased how Trump's winning took everyone by surprise forcing the most accurate of analysts to reconsider their former claims and confirmations. The third chapter inspected the agenda setting dynamics in the United States 2016 presidential elections and how the practice of selecting topics helped greatly in establishing the media agenda that focused on the fashion of audiences to fit into the mold designed by decision-makers. In the same regard, the paper tried to bring attention to the fact that stating a firm position regarding an issue or another could be a dangerous game for candidates and that it could make them either win or lose an election. Media Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Campaign was at the heart of this paper. It was shown by practical examples and tables obtained from recognized surveys that a significant percentage of news coverage was biased and instead of focusing on bringing support for the candidates, most of the American media vehiculated a huge deal of negativity in their coverage of the two campaigns, especially

regarding Donald Trump who was depicted as the perfect anti-hero of the political scene. As also stated, Donald trump benefited from a greater coverage time than Clinton because of the fiery temper that made him a media sensation, unlike Hilary who was considered an 'old-fashioned politician' whose claims are chewed and masticated. Those extremely opposing mediatic outcomes decided who won the presental run. Social and Digital Media in the 2016 presidential campaign were also worth grappling with because of their strategic positions as contemporary sources of information and their direct form of interaction with voters. Traditional forms of media saw the necessity to migrate to new digitalized forms as a matter of survival. Social media accounts of media corporations such as CNN, FOX, and CSNBS flourished on platforms like Facebook and Twitter where they could benefit from a gigantic number of users and subscribers. Twitter was the object of focus of the last section of the paper where it had been shown that this platform was the battle horse between the candidates. Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton benefited from an astonishingly large number of followers who could be directly addressed instantly via tweets. Twitter as proven by the study conducted by Conway, showed similar activities as the traditional media when it deals with high-profile figures by adopting the same agenda setting mechanisms. Finally, the claims in this paper are not the expression of definitive positions. An impetus of honesty suggests mentioning that although agenda setting is an acclaimed theory based on scientific qualitative and quantitative studies that keep evolving every year it is yet still not perfect. It considers most of the audiences as passive and manipulatable whereas recent studies revealed that media literacy in recent years has grown in importance raising awareness among audiences who responded by growing more critical towards contents forwarded by media. A theory of reverse agenda setting saw light in the age of digital and social media that claims that "media platforms have arguably enabled the public to set the agenda for their representatives by pressing like button on their Facebook updates, sharing and commenting on these updates". (Nair and Sandeep). The reverse agenda setting enabled users of social media to shape the political landscape by forcing the decision-makers to align with what the public opinion wants. This novelty opens the gate to more questions than it brings answers. The world of media is full of uncertainties and debatable claims but established theories even though not perfect are still very reliable in critically approaching media concerns.

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