

Agenda Setting & the News



A presentation by the Mucktracker Team



Objective

Analyze how algorithmic and editorial agenda setting influence news coverage.

Connect

Do you think newspapers and online sources do a good job of covering the most important news stories?

Why or why not?



What is Agenda Setting?



Deciding what to cover has traditionally been a concern of journalism and is reflected in the theory of *agenda setting*. Agenda setting is the power to influence public perception regarding which stories and stances are most important.

We can see agendas in the fact that some stories are given more coverage, and more prominent coverage, than others. You can observe this with stories that are:

- given bigger headlines
- positioned to catch readers' attention first
- often the same as stories highlighted by other outlets (even if presented in radically different ways)

Editorial Agenda Setting in Action

Let's consider the front pages of various newspapers and see the differences in their respective agendas.

Using Today's Front Pages from the Freedom Forum, compare the front pages of some of the largest circulating national papers such as the *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, and the *New York Post*. Then, compare these with local, regional, and international papers. Then, answer:

- What do you notice about how these stories are placed on the front page, and how much space they are given?
- Are the same stories given the most prominence?
- Which topics, events, and people are most discussed?

Newsworthiness & Agenda Setting

NEW
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NEW

When you surveyed these newspapers, you may have noticed certain factors that were common among important stories.

- For example, you may have seen that the stories were the most recent. In journalism, this is known as *timeliness*, and is one of the factors that make up *newsworthiness*.

Newsworthiness refers to the criteria that editors consider when choosing to cover and publish a story.

- Editors often ask themselves: *Is this deserving, or worthy, of publication?*

What Influences Newsworthiness?

- **timeliness:** a story that describes events that are recent, current, or about to happen
- *historical impact:* a story that describes a significant event (the kind of thing that ends up in the history books)
- *novelty:* a story that describes an unusual or remarkable occurrence
- *relevance to a general or particular audience:* a story that's especially appealing to a media outlet's audience (or a smaller constituency of their audience)



Now, let's move from looking at one day to looking at agenda setting over a longer period of time.

Launch Mucktracker and search for two of the news topics you noticed, using the Timeline feature.



- Which publications are focused around these topics today? This week? This month?
- Take screenshots and notes to document what you find.
- What newsworthiness factors do you think influenced the choice to report these stories?

Wrap-Up



- Agenda setting is the power to influence public perception regarding which stories and stances are most important.
- Journalists and news editors make these decisions based on principles of newsworthiness, such as timeliness, historical impact, novelty, and relevance to a particular audience.
- What constitutes the “news” has changed over time and continues to change, as news media can reach global audiences. What do you think the news should look like?