**UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE**

CLASS: BAJMS INTAKE 1

COURSE: POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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QUESTION: **Discuss the relationship between agenda setting and political communication.**

Agenda is the news of a particular day, more specifically the story, and how the news is told. Political communication is the process by which language and symbols, employed by leaders, media or citizens exert intended or unintended effects on political cognitions or behaviour of individuals or on outcomes that bear on the public policy a nation, state or community. Political science studies that includes measures of media attention range from those lobbing to presidential behaviour to the public opinion and knowledge to media agenda setting.

The media as a political player can set the news agenda. The concept of agenda setting is founded in the study of the media, particularly the press and is linked to famous adage that “the media cannot tell you what to think but, only tell you what to think about” [ McCombs and Shaw, 1972]. According to Lilleker [2010] a key function of political communication is to make the public think about an issue in a way that is favourable to the sender of the message. Journalists use media frames to organize and make sense of events. Framing is a process of selecting control, a way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualised within the same frame of reference. These cognitive frames help people process and make sense of message presented on media platforms. Gastil ,2009 points out that key influence on journalist choices of media frame including the prevailing social norms of their society pressures and constraints within their media organisation, interest group pressures, the journalistic habits and routine they have developed over the years and finally their own ideological orientation or at least as often those of their editors.

Political institutions and leaders influences agenda setting of the media through political communication. Every organisation that desires to influence the public politically attempts to control what ideas become dominant in the public sphere, Lilleker,2010 notes that agenda setting is the most important part of political campaign, but can have a negative impact on the civic society and the public c sphere due to the public becoming cynical about the information it receives. Organisation which aim to strategically set and control the news agenda will employ communication officers, who will attempt to control the information available to the media to ensure a negative line cannot be taken. There is evidence that in many situations the news media have been persuaded, manipulated or even coerced to follow political [or military] views on international affairs [Paletz,1996]. Subsequently, political parties restrict public access to the fact and enforce the nation of hegemonic model in an information society. In a thriving pluralist democracy, all voices should be heard, however the ability of some groups to dominate the agenda can restrict pluralism [ Lilleker,2010]. This results in political conflict with political parties, corporations and other groups in society each of whom wish to set the news agenda.

Furthermore, in a democratic nation the relationship between agenda setting and political communication remain strong but it gives room for more criticism and conflict in community or nation. In democratic nation there is pluralistic democracy, where everyone has equal chance to express or to set their agenda. This promote more diverse voice to be heard. This means that democracy allows the free flow of political communication messages, this expose many different facts. Usually political communication messages are characterised with more sensitive and emotional information which end up promoting massive conflicts in community because for many different agendas. Hence, despite the effects brought as a result of political communication, political communication and agenda setting always work hand in hand because setting an agenda is catalyst to political communication.

Moreover, the public and pressure groups can also communicate politically through many different ways and that can also become an agenda to both media and the government. For example, pressure groups like Tajamuka in Zimbabwe is a non-patriotic group but were able to communicate political messages through song, verbal messages and even carrying Zimbabwe nation flag as a symbol that communicate political ideas. However, political communication by public and pressure groups was able to draw the attention of the media, government and number of individuals were not part of political communication which is a very clear sign that public and pressure groups are also able to set agenda. As a result, this clearly explains that, no matter who set agenda for who, political communication and agenda setting are difficult to separate

In summation, the relationship between agenda setting and political communication is difficult to dilute. Agenda setting is a catalyst to political communication. Politian’s communicate main to reach to manipulate majority thinking of people, hence for their messages to reach the majority they set the agenda for them. Usually politicians use media platform to spread their agenda to the public. On the other side, the public can set the agenda for both the media and the government, this is known as public agenda. However, this seems to explain that agenda setting and political communication always work hand in hand.

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