



The Relationship Between The TV News Media And Public Agendas On Electoral Issues In India

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Abstract

The agenda-setting model developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972) suggests that there is a strong correlation between the media agenda (salience of issues) set by news media and the public agenda (public opinion) of its respective audience. Further, later studies have emphasised other contingent conditions that largely shape the public agenda and increase or decrease the salience transfer of issues from media to the public. However, it has been observed that there are a smaller number of academic works focusing on agenda-setting theory in developing countries like India. Thus against the backdrop of the scope for agenda-setting work on television news media in developing countries combined with contingent conditions, this empirical study has explored the agenda-setting roles of two Hindi news channels (Aaj Tak and NDTV India) on major electoral issues during the general elections of 2014. Quantitative research design has been adopted wherein the content analysis of news items/objects related to the issues broadcast by these two news channels was conducted during January-March, 2014 combined with a survey of 384 viewers from key urban parliamentary constituencies of three states to examine the relationship between media and public agenda. This quantitative study has established a significant correlation between the media agenda of Aaj Tak and NDTV India and the public agenda of their respective viewers during the general elections of 2014. However, it was also found that other contingent conditions such as contemporary political scenario, obtrusiveness and concreteness of issues, individuals' need for orientation and viewers' interpersonal communication among their co-workers, friends, relatives and family members determined agenda-setting effect to a great extent. Regarding slant and framing, this study has revealed that NDTV India gave favourable and pro-government treatment to the news items/objects about the then UPA-2 government compared to the Aaj Tak.

Keywords: agenda-setting, contingent conditions, electoral issues, Hindi news channels, media agenda, public agenda, salience transfer

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INTRODUCTION

The role of television news channels has been found as unexceptionally tremendous across the world. The public draws pictures of the world out there through the images provided by the news channels. News media have significantly influenced the "focus of attention" and viewers' thinking for the past seven decades. Through various events that take place daily, we can understand only a few issues/events in broader perspectives. The

very fact that the prominent source of information is none other than news media could not be ignored. We witness the events/issues worldwide, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the American-Presidential election, the war effects due to the ISIS in gulf countries, and the worsening conditions at the Indo-Pak border, among others, through the news media. We get to know about the issues and form our opinion through the images that news media constructs.

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News media organisations do not merely present any information as it was received or any event as it happened; they also determine viewers' perceptions about those issues through selections and presentation of the same in a specific way daily. News media influences people's ability to see and listen and helps in the creation of thoughts. The news media restructures viewers' thinking by giving meaningful structures to the events and happenings. This observation led to the development of interests among researchers and intellectuals to determine the effects of news media on viewers. Agenda setting studies discussed the assumptions that the mass media reflects the shadow of reality and provides shape and contour to the truth. Constructing the particular image of issues/events involves regularly highlighting and editing specific issues and activities. We happen to get "mediated reality" via news media. This particular ability of news media, i.e., shaping our mindset and developing the pros and cons of an event, is regarded as the metaphor of "agenda-setting theory".

Unfolding the agenda-setting function of news media, McCombs (2002) writes, "The mass media have the ability to carry the salience of items on their news agendas and then transfer it to public agenda."

McCombs and Shaw (1972) studied the agenda-setting role of mass media to establish the relationship between media agenda and public agenda. McCombs and Shaw (1972) found that undecided voters (voters not having specific loyalty to any political party or leader) were the perfect destination for knowing the effects of media on audiences. Comparing content analysis results of news items/objects from national and local news media with the survey responses of viewers/readers from Chapel Hill revealed a significant correlation between media agenda and public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This research study established the branch of agenda-setting theory and gave birth to a new research tradition. The various kinds of perspectives came with this agenda-setting theory. The first perspective is related to the salience of issues from the media agenda to the public agenda. The following framing perspective deals with how and in what ways news media frames different kinds of issues/events.

The primary theoretical concept of agenda-setting not only states that news media informs us, but it also influences our decision regarding what we should know or what we should not. This function of news media demonstrates that media can bring cognitive changes into the public psyche. The agenda-setting theory asserts that the priorities of the media agenda get changes into the public's priorities over time. The media more emphasise the public attraction to the events.

About the study

The present study investigates the agenda-setting role of news media in the Indian context. This study examines the news and discussion programs which the news channels broadcast on various issues/events. Further, this study also establishes the correlation between media and public agendas. This quantitative empirical study fills the gap and contributes to the enrichment of agenda-setting research in the Indian context. The researchers of western countries have edited more than 400 research studies based on the different aspects and dimensions of agenda-setting theory. However, the number of research works in Asiatic countries following the theoretical framework of agenda-setting are few and far between. Even in the Indian subcontinent, the exploration of the agenda-setting role of news media is scarce.

The rationale of this study

Against the backdrop of scope for agenda-setting research in developing countries like India, it is essential to conduct an explorative study to describe the inter-relationship among news media agenda and public agenda. Thus, the study aims at examining the relationship among mass media agenda and public agenda in the Indian context. The present study has analysed the agenda-setting role of two Hindi news channels on six critical electoral issues. Most of the studies investigating the agenda-setting effect of media have focused on only developed countries except a few in developing countries like India. The main contribution of this study is to investigate the agenda-setting function of the television news media in the Indian context.

Research design

This empirical study has adopted two research methods: content analysis and survey, to



explore the correlation between the media and public agendas in the Indian context. Importantly, this combination of research methods has also been used by scholars to investigate the agenda-setting role of mass media worldwide. Firstly, the research has content-analysed the news bulletins and discussion programmes broadcast by two Hindi language television news channels. NDTV India and Aaj Tak were chosen for the study. After conducting the content analysis, the researcher has identified the rank-order of issues given by news channels. A survey of non-decided voters was administered to establish the correlation between the rank-order of issues set by the news channels and the rank-order of issues identified afterwards.

Content analysis

This study examines the media agenda through the content analysis of the two largest and widely broadcasting Indian Hindi TV news channels, the Aaj Tak and NDTV India. The rationale for selecting these news channels is that their national reach is highest among all the news channels in India (TAM Media Research, 2014). They are offering 24-hour Hindi-language news in India and adoring a robust professional reputation among audiences as they cover almost all of the issues/events at the national and international level. These two organisations' news anchors, editors, reporters, and other news persons are professionally qualified and have expertise in their respective fields. Both the channels host many panel discussions and debates on concurrent issues.

Content analysis towards news programmes of Aaj Tak and NDTV India has been conducted during and prior to the Indian General Elections-2014. The reason for selecting this period is that the TV news channels have broadcasted the electoral issues broadly in this period. The content analyses of the NDTV India and Aaj Tak have been conducted from 10th January 2014 (three months prior to the elections) to 10th April 2014 (starting phases of the elections). The news stories/debates/panel discussions during prime time (7 PM to 11 PM), which were associated with the issues chosen for the study, have been selected for the content analysis. Variables of the Content Analysis are Length (length was measured based on total time given to the particular issue), Frequency

Slant (favourable to the government, unfavourable to government and neutral), Frame (pro-government, anti-government, and neutral) and Placement (In the beginning, In the middle, At last).

Variables, categories and rules for coding

Variables such as length, frequency, slant and Frame have been studied following the categorisation and corresponding rules. Frequency and length were measured based on the total time given to the particular issue, while slant was measured as favourable, unfavourable and neutral. Details of variables, the categorisation and rules are as follows:

Variable(s)	Categories	Rules
Length		Length is defined as the broadcast duration of news items/objects on select electoral issues.
Slant	Favourable to government	It means the theme of the news item is favourable to the government.
	Unfavourable to government	It means the theme of the news item is unfavourable to the government.
	Neutral	It means the theme of the news item is neutral to the government.
Frame	Pro-government	Pro-government frames construct a positive image of government on the issues selected for the study.
	Anti-government	Anti-government frames create a negative image of government on the issues selected for the study.
	Neutral	Those news items/objects not framed in either pro and/or anti-government sides are neutral.

Table 1: Categories and Rules for Coding of the variables

Survey research method

In this study, the public agenda has been measured through an audience survey. A survey of three hundred eighty-four (384) regular viewers of Aaj Tak and NDTV India (192 viewers from each news channel) was conducted in crucial urban parliamentary constituencies of New Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan during six phases of the General Elections-2014. Samples of 384 respondents were selected proportionately from seven constituencies. The rationale for choosing the respondents living in urban areas is that these two channels are highly urban-centric in their coverage (Kuthiala & Singh, 2006). In this study of TV coverage of the national and state capital, big cities and places, it was found that solid urban bias was operating in the whole production process of television news channels as 70 per cent (35+22+2+11) of total news items were related to these cities. A comparison was made between significant findings



obtained through content analysis of news items/objects broadcast by Aaj Tak and NDTV and a survey of their respective viewers from seven parliamentary constituencies. Further, the researcher also compared the content analysis results of electoral items/objects broadcast by the Aaj Tak and NDTV with the survey responses collected from the viewers of respective channels.

Sampling procedures

The viewers of Hindi TV News channels are the universe, while 384 viewers selected from key urban parliamentary constituencies of Rajasthan, New Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh are samples of this empirical quantitative study. The survey was conducted with 384 respondents from 7 urban parliamentary constituencies during the different phases of the general election of 2014. The respondents were selected following the judgemental sampling technique. The details are given below:

Sr. No.	Date	Name of constituency	Constituency number	The phase of general elections
1.	10-04-2014	East Delhi	03	3
2.	17-04-2014	Jaipur	07	5
3.	24-04-2014	Kanpur	43	6
4.	30-04-2014	Lucknow	35	7
5.	07-05-2014	Phulpur & Allahabad	51, 52	8
6.	12-05-2014	Varanasi	77	9

Table 2: Details of survey research.

Variables of the present study Salience assigned to issues.

One of these quantitative study variables was measuring the salience assigned to the issues and events. Measuring salience respondents were provided with a list of issues, and they were asked to provide a ranking as per their perceptions and priorities.

Profiles of the news channels selected for the study

1. Aaj Tak

Aaj Tak is one of the top-rated Hindi TV news channels in India. The channel was launched as a 24x7 Hindi news channel in 2000. The channel is owned and controlled by Living Media (India Today group) and NCR (national capital region) based Indian media conglomerate. Soon after 6 months of its launch, it became the best channel in the

country. It is the front-runner in India's most-watched Hindi news channels and has reached 30 million households in India. Aaj Tak has bagged the best channel award from two renowned agencies, "The Limca book of world records" and the "Indian Television Academy". Aaj Tak is a highly recognised news channel in the country and abroad due to its high professional standards (Rao, 2008).

2. NDTV India

NDTV India is one of the country's largest widely broadcast Hindi news channels. The news channel was launched in 2003 with its English counterpart NDTV 24x7. The channel was the brainchild of its chairman Pranoy Roy and managing director Radhika Roy. The headquarters of NDTV India is located in New Delhi. The channel is among the most-watched channels, and it secured the second position after Aaj Tak in all India reach (TAM Media Research, 2008). News and current affairs programs broadcast on NDTV India gained popularity. The channel has constantly highlighted social issues through its dedicated and innovative approach. It has consistently remained India's most trusted TV brand (TRA Trust Brand Report, India Study 2016).

Issues covered in this study

After a thorough review of the available literature of agenda-setting theory and outcomes of the pilot study, the researcher has found some issues which were very common amongst all the studies. The main electoral issues identified from the literature review and the content analysis of news items are as follows:

1. Corruption

In developing countries like India, corruption has emerged as a central issue. The second stint of the Congress-led UPA (United Progressive Alliance) government has been extensively accused of corruption, which was a big issue in the news media. The resent against corruption was also evidenced in the broad coverage of Anna Hazare's "Jan Lokpal movement (movement for ombudsman)" given by TV news channels. In the initial phases of this anti-corruption movement, Hindi TV news channels alone gave some 606 hours of coverage. In the 2014 general election campaign, this issue persisted at the centre of political debate. The



then main opposition party, BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party), made this issue their biggest weapon to wage election campaigns against the Congress-led UPA-2 regime.

2. Inflation

If we take a close look at the Congress-led UPA-2 tenure (2009-2014), the inflation rate remained around ten per cent. It means the price of goods/services increased ten per cent per year. Typically inflation rate is 3 to 4 per cent which is considered suitable for the economy. Given the high inflation rate and consequent high consumer goods and services prices, inflation became a central political debate after the news media covered the issue extensively. The BJP, a significant opposition party, made it a big issue during the 2014 general election campaign.

3. Development

For the present study, development has been operationalised as physical and infrastructural development such as electricity, water, education, road and health services. These five factors play a vital role in bringing widespread changes in human life. It includes the basic needs of the people and human rights and development issues, which were at the epicentre of political debate during the 2014 general elections.

4. Employment

The country's unemployment rate was pegged at 8-10% during the last years of UPA-2 tenure. In the 2014 general elections, the BJP, which was the main opposition party, raised the issue of employment extensively. The BJP's prime ministerial candidate Mr Narendra Modi had promised ten million jobs every year in a public rally in Agra during the general election-2014 campaigns.

5. Criminalisation of politics

An analysis done on the first five phases of the 2014 general elections by the ADR exposed that all the political parties had distributed tickets to the candidates having criminal backgrounds. It was ironic that the candidates with criminal records had 13% chances of winnability, whereas, for the candidates with clean records, winnability was only 5% (ADR, 2014). The 2014 general elections also reinforced the possibility of winning elections based on

money power. The pioneer judgment came in 2013 from the Supreme Court of India stating that convicted MPs and MLAs will be disqualified for their posts with immediate effect, and there will be a complete ban on contesting the election by convicted candidates for the six years even after the end of their punishment.

6. Caste and communal interests

Indian political system operates in a broad social environment where caste and communal mobilisations play a dominant role. Caste structure provides an organisational cluster wherein the bulk of the population subsists. The traditional Indian social, political, economic and other institutions were organised and structured purely on the caste system. The caste system, subsequent caste identity, and caste politics are essential in Indian polity. Politics finds material in the caste system and moulds it into its design (Kothari, 1995). Caste and communalism are complex phenomena having many facets (Nandy, 2004). Like the caste system, religion provides the people and group of people with a common focal point for identity and social solidarity (Smith, 2015).

Research objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1) To measure the effects of Hindi news channels on the public agenda of their respective viewers concerning the six electoral issues.
- 2) To compare the news coverage of the electoral issues between the two news channels selected for the study.
- 3) To determine the correlation between the media agenda of news channels and the public agenda found among the non-decided voters.
- 4) To find out the role of other contingent conditions in influencing and setting the public agenda besides the news media.

Research Questions (RQs)

Research questions (RQs) of the present study are as follows:

- RQ 1: Whether a correlation exists between the media agenda and the public agenda?
RQ 2: Whether the Aaj Tak and the NDTV have the same sets of agenda regarding the electoral issues during General Elections-2014?



RQ 3: Whether there was a difference between the reportage of the Aaj Tak and NDTV India about the slant and frames bestowed on the electoral issues?

RQ 4: Whether agenda setting works for unobtrusive issues or obtrusive issues?

RQ 5: Whether and to what extent the Aaj Tak and NDTV India were favourable or unfavourable to the previous UPA government on the electoral issues?

RQ 6: Whether greater importance was given to the issue of corruption by the Aaj Tak and NDTV India?

The classical hypothesis of agenda-setting theory

The greater the coverage of issues in TV news channels, the greater will be its significance in public agenda.

Data analysis and findings

Coverage of Aaj Tak

Coverage of Aaj Tak (From 10th January to 10th March 2014)	
Issue	Length
Corruption	13 Hours 05 Minutes
Caste and Communal Interest	6 Hours 35 Minutes
Development	6 Hours 09 Minutes
Inflation	4 Hours 05 Minutes
Employment	3 Hours 04 Minutes
Criminalisation of Politics	2 Hours 56 Minutes
Total length considered excluding political non-issue based news program	35 Hours 54 Minutes
Political Non-issue based news program	53 Hours 04 Minutes
Overall length analysed	88 Hours 58 Minutes

Table 3: Coverage of Aaj Tak

Coverage of NDTV India

Coverage of NDTV India (From 10th January to 10th March 2014)	
Issue	Length
Corruption	9 Hours 52 Minutes
Caste and Communal Interest	7 Hours 43 Minutes
Development	6 Hours 44 Minutes
Inflation	4 Hours 06 Minutes
Criminalisation of Politics	2 Hours 07 Minutes
Employment	1 Hour 15 Minutes
Total length Analysed (Excluding Political non-issue based news)	31 Hours 47 Minutes
Political Non-issue based news	65 Hours 24 Minutes
Overall length analysed	97 Hours 11 Minutes

Table 4: Overall coverage of NDTV India

Comparison between the coverage patterns of Aaj Tak and NDTV India



Figure 1: Comparison between the coverage patterns of Aaj Tak and NDTV India

When we compare the coverage pattern of AajTak and Ndtv India, the data table and figure (line chart) clearly show that similar patterns have been found for both channels in all the issues under study. Here, Ndtv India is focusing more on the issues of caste and communal interest and development than the AajTak. Ndtv India marginalised the issue of employment in comparison to AajTak.

Here null hypothesis is that NDTV and Aajtak marginalised the issues of employment. The table value of chi-square for 5 degrees of freedom at 5% level of significance is 11.070. Here the calculated value (73.33) is much higher than the table value. So we call that null hypothesis or experimental hypothesis is rejected or data does not support the experimental hypothesis. Hence, NDTV India is focusing more on the issues of caste and communal interest and development than the AajTak.

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Slants for the overall news items broadcast in Aaj Tak and NDTV India

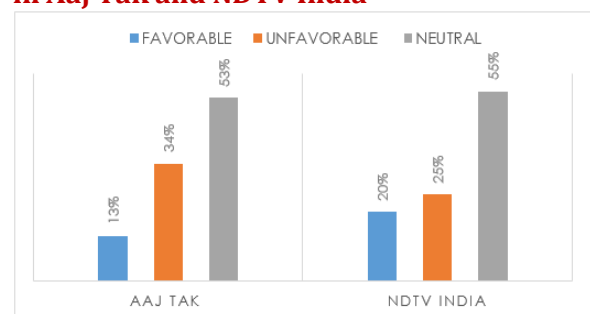


Figure 2: Slants for the news items broadcast in Aaj Tak and NDTV India

As figure 2 indicates, NDTV India gave more favourable news coverage (20%) than the Aaj Tak (13%). The figure also depicts that NDTV India gave less unfavourable news coverage (25%) than the Aaj Tak (34%). The neutral



coverage patterns of both channels were perhaps similar to each other.

Framing for the news items broadcast in Aaj Tak and NDTV India

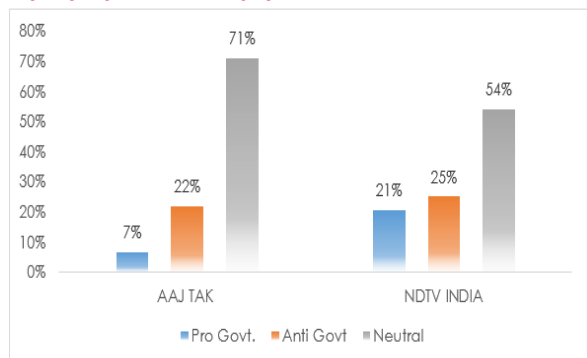


Figure 3: Framing for the news items broadcast in Aaj Tak and NDTV India

As figure 3 illustrates, NDTV India framed more positive (pro) news (21%) to the UPA-2 in comparison to the Aaj Tak (7%). The figure also portrays that NDTV India framed 25% negative (anti) news to the UPA-2. The similarity was found in the negative (anti) framing of Aaj Tak, which framed 22% negative news to the UPA-2. Here, a difference can be seen between the Aaj Tak and NDTV India in neutral or no framing. Aaj Tak broadcast 71% of news items with neutral or no framing, whereas NDTV India broadcast 54% of news items with neutral or no framing. So we can say that significant differences exist between the policies of the two news channels. It seems that NDTV India tried to favour the UPA-2 on their coverage.

Outcomes of the survey research

The researcher selected 384 viewers from the Aaj Tak and the NDTV India (192 viewers from each) and administered the questionnaire to determine the agenda-setting effect of news channels. The respondents were asked about their primary source of information, stake on various electoral issues, informal discussion among their kith and kin and several other things. The survey helped the researcher determine the salience or rank order conferred on six electoral issues selected for the study. The results and findings of the survey research are presented in the forthcoming sections.

Rank-order of issues assigned by viewers of Aaj Tak and NDTV India

The most prominent and principal question that the survey research dealt with was

examining and determining the rank-order or salience bestowed by Aaj Tak and NDTV India viewers on varied issues. The responses of viewers of the Aaj Tak obtained from survey research differ significantly compared to the viewers of NDTV India. The content analysis results also show the differences between these two channels.

Issues	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
Corruption	33.3 %	22.4 %	14.6 %	14.6 %	9.4 %	5.7 %
Inflation	24.5 %	33.3 %	20.8 %	10.4 %	6.8 %	4.2 %
Employment	16.7 %	14.1 %	22.9 %	16.7 %	13.0 %	16.7 %
Development	11.5 %	17.2 %	16.1 %	28.1 %	15.6 %	11.5 %
Criminalisation of Politics	3.1 %	6.8 %	18.2 %	19.3 %	30.7 %	21.9 %
Caste and Communal Interest	10.9 %	6.3 %	7.4 %	10.9 %	24.5 %	40.1 %

Table 5: Salience (rank-order) of issues on public agenda of viewers of Aaj Tak

Issues	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th
Corruption	40.1%	24.5%	11.9%	11.5%	9.9%	2.1%
Inflation	22.9%	25.5%	14.6%	20.8%	7.3%	8.9%
Employment	18.8%	8.3%	24.4%	15.1%	12.0%	21.4%
Development	7.3%	5.7%	21.9%	24.5%	18.7%	21.9%
Criminalization of Politics	8.3%	26.0%	12.0%	15.6%	26.6%	12.5%
Caste and Communal Interest	3.6%	10.0%	15.2%	12.5%	25.5%	33.2%

Table 6: Salience (rank-order) of issues on public agenda of the viewers of NDTV India

Corruption: Foremost significant electoral issue

The corruption issue was the most prominent and significant among all six issues by both channels; the Aaj Tak and NDTV India.

Inflation: The second most significant issue

The outcome of the survey research suggests that 33.3% of viewers of the Aaj Tak and 25.5% of NDTV India posited inflation (rising prices food grains and essential commodities) as the second most prominent and significant issue amongst all the six electoral issues.

Employment: Third most significant electoral issue

It is manifested in table 5 and table 6 that most viewers from both the Aaj Tak and the NDTV India acknowledged employment as the third most prominent and significant electoral issue during the 2014 general elections.

Development: Fourth significant electoral issue

Tables 5 and 6 expound that the electoral issue of development was ranked the fourth place by



most viewers from both news channels in the rank-order/salience of six electoral issues selected for this empirical study during the general elections of 2014.

The criminalisation of politics: Fifth significant electoral issue

It is evidenced in table 5 and 6 that most viewers from Aaj Tak (30.7%) and NDTV India (26.6%) considered the electoral issue of criminalisation of politics lesser significant and ranked it at the fifth place only.

Caste and communal interests: The least significant issue

The caste and communal interests appeared to be the least important issue amongst all six electoral issues as per the viewers' opinions from the Aaj Tak and the NDTV India.

Viewers' opinion on electoral issues selected for the study

The slant or leaning in terms of favourable to the government, unfavourable to government and/or not clear constructed in the news items/objects on six electoral issues selected was measured through content analysis research method. Further, the effect of slant constructed by the news channels, viewers of these two news channels was interviewed through survey research and asked about their opinion on the select six electoral issues. By comparing the results of survey research with content analysis, the agenda-setting role of Aaj Tak and NDTV India in terms of transfer of salience/rank-order from media to the public was studied. The public opinion of viewers from Aaj Tak and NDTV India has been illustrated in Table 7 and Table 8, respectively:

Issue	Corruption	Inflation	Criminalisation of Politics	Development	Employment	Caste and Communal Interest
FAVOURABLE TO GOVT	22.4%	16.7%	68.2%	15.6%	7.8%	8.9%
UNFAVOURABLE TO GOVT	59.9%	65.1%	17.2%	74.0%	74.0%	78.6%
NOT CLEAR	17.7%	18.2%	14.6%	10.4%	18.2%	12.5%

Table 7: Public opinion of viewers of Aaj Tak

Issue	Corruption	Inflation	Criminalisation of Politics	Development	Employment	Caste and Communal Interest
FAVOURABLE TO GOVT	30.8%	16.7%	66.1%	14.1%	12.0%	9.9%
UNFAVOURABLE TO GOVT	51.0%	65.1%	15.1%	69.8%	70.3%	72.9%
NOT CLEAR	18.2%	18.2%	18.8%	16.1%	17.7%	17.2%

Table 8: Public opinion of viewers of NDTV India

Major findings and discussion

This empirical study's most substantial and significant finding is a significant relationship between the media agenda and the public agenda. The comparison of the content analysis with the survey data establishes that the salience/rank order of electoral issues set by Aaj Tak and NDTV India got significantly reflected in the public agenda of their respective viewers during the general elections of 2014. This study based on crucial urban constituencies supports the classical hypothesis of agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Besides buttressing the conventional hypothesis of agenda-setting theory, this study has also found that viewers' need for orientation on various issues, multitude of news media exposure, obtrusiveness of issues and other contingent factors played substantial and significant role in determining public agenda. For the obtrusive issues that were directly related with viewers' daily life, they were not wholly dependent on news media. The finding of this study on the obtrusiveness of issues and their corresponding effect on the public agenda is consistent with the findings of a classical study of Demers et al. (1989). The agenda-setting role of news media is relatively more substantial in the case of unobtrusive issues, and thus this factor can be taken into consideration while setting the research questions (RQ) and hypotheses (Demers et al., 1987; Riaz, 2008). This quantitative study, focussed on measuring the agenda-setting role of Hindi news channels, has revealed that the agenda-setting effect of Aaj Tak and NDTV India was highly significant in respect of unobtrusive issues such as corruption and criminalisation of politics. In contrast, there was a weak correlation between the media agenda of selected news channels and the public agenda of their respective viewers concerning obtrusive issues such as inflation and employment during the general elections of 2014.

It is evident in Tables 3 and 4, which represent the overall coverage given to electoral issues selected for the study by Aaj Tak and NDTV India, that both news channels had a similar set of agendas. The salience/rank order of issues except for the issue of employment in one news channel is identical to the media agenda of another news channel. The finding on remarkable similarity between the agenda of



these two Hindi news channels can be explained as the consequence of competitiveness, inter-dependency and a similar set of work routines (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Khan et al., 2015). News organisations depend on each other for content. Operating in the same competitive market, they also closely monitor each other's news stories and form strategies for coverage accordingly. These factors, including the routine work, tend to bring striking similarities in the coverage of issues during the election or non-election period.

The serendipitous and unanticipated findings obtained through survey research in respect of other obtrusive issues such as inflation and employment, which go against the rank-order of media agenda of Aaj Tak and NDTV India, vindicate the role and effect of contingent factors in either increasing or decreasing the salience transfer from the news media to the public in a corresponding way (Smith, 1987; Palmgreen & Clark, 1977).

This empirical study has shown that Aaj Tak and NDTV India viewers attached more prominence and significance to employment and electoral inflation issues than rank-order given to both news channels. Though these issues were bearing lesser significance on the media agenda of Aaj Tak and NDTV India, they were the main concerns of the viewers of respective news channels. This finding can be explicated with scholarly work available on concreteness and abstractness of issues which might increase and diminish the agenda-setting effect of news media (Yagade & Dozier, 1990). The issue of development is abstract since the viewers do not get confronted with this issue daily, and therefore despite being significant in the media agenda, this issue was perceived as lesser significant. On the other hand, the issues of inflation and employment, which are concrete, were the foremost concerns of the viewers despite being weakly significant in the media agenda.

Given the lesser significance attached to concrete issues such as employment and inflation in the media agenda, it is concluded that the national news media (Hindi electronic media) did not cover the real-life issues which were profoundly affecting the viewers. The issues of inflation (price-rise) and general scarcity of employment were the real-life difficulties of the public in Indian society, but

the national media, especially Hindi TV news channels, provided fewer coverage to these issues than other problems.

Another key finding of this study is the relationship between overall news items and the broadcast duration. Thus while setting the research questions and hypothesis, this might be noted that the agenda-setting effect of news media is to be measured considering both the total news items/objects broadcast during the study period and the duration of such news items. The data gained through content analysis reveals a significant difference in the number of stories covered by Aaj Tak (266 news items) and the NDTV India (208 news items). However, this variance was found due to the difference in formats, genres, and editorial and agenda-setting policies of both TV news channels. For example, the Aaj Tak broadcast more news items of short-period like 15 minutes or 30 minutes format while the NDTV India broadcast more news items of long duration like 1 hour (Ravish Kumar's Prime Time) or 30 minutes format.

As manifested in Figures 2 & 3, NDTV India gave more favourable coverage (slant) and frames (pro-government) to the then Congress-led UPA-2 government than the Aaj Tak on the six electoral issues examined in this study. This finding of the study can be matched with a widespread allegation on NDTV India that the channel is of *Left-of-Center* viewpoints and the entire NDTV leadership team has deep ties with the Indian National Congress and CPI (M) politicians. Here the fact could not be ignored that Radhika Roy (Managing Director of NDTV), the wife of Pranoy Roy (Chairman of NDTV), is a sister of Brinda Karat, the famous CPM leader. It should also be noted that Brinda Karat is the wife of Prakash Karat, CPM Politburo General Secretary. Pranoy Roy is also the first cousin of the famous far-leftist writer and novelist Arundhati Roy. NDTV's anchor Sonia Singh's, wife of R. P. N. Singh (ex-Congress MP and ex-union minister) pro-Congress and anti-BJP bias reflected in her anchoring.

The people's opinion regarding the considered issues was another significant variable of the survey exploration to check whether the framing and slant offered in news items certainly impacted the public agenda. Commonly, more than half of the news items had neutral coverage (no slant), and no framing (neutral framing) on all the electoral issues



studied. Again, within the rest of the news items, on average, the number of unfavourable slants and anti-government framing to the UPA-2 government was higher than the number of favourable slants and pro-government framing. Further, when we look at public opinion about the UPA-2 government, most of the respondents of both news channels expressed an anti-UPA-2 opinion. This result can strongly be correlated with the country's political condition as the then Congress-led UPA-2 government faced many allegations of corruption, scams, and scandals. The performance of the UPA-2 was not satisfactory, and the government was branded as the most inefficient government in dealing with the issues like corruption, inflation, employment and development. At that time, the reasons like the anti-corruption movement led by Anna Hazare and other and the steady rise of another political rival (Arvind Kejariwal, who formed a new political party called *Aam Aadmi Party*) also significantly shaped the public perception regarding the performance of the then UPA-2 regime. The then political conditions were also vigorously highlighted by the news channels, which affected the public agenda to a great extent and resultantly, the issue of corruption became the country's most prominent problem (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Conclusion

Having studied the agenda-setting roles of two Hindi news channels on six electoral issues during the 2014 general elections in India, it is concluded that there is a causal relationship between the media agenda of the news channels and the public agenda of their respective viewers. The main finding of this quantitative study provides empirical support to the classical hypothesis of agenda-setting theory with specific reference to Hindi news channels in the Indian context (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, Weaver et al., 1981; Nair, 2008; Riaz, 2008; Funkhouser, 1973a; Ghanem, 1996).

However, this study has also found that that the transfer of agenda-setting effect of news media to the public is dependent on a couple of contingent factors such as obtrusiveness of issues, interpersonal Communication, need for orientation and contemporary political conditions, among others (Smith, 1987; Palmgreen & Clark, 1977; Zucker, 1978;

Weaver, 1977; Weaver, 1980; Riaz, 2008; Winter, 1981; Walgrave & Aelst, 2006). Thus, in the case of two unobtrusive issues, such as corruption and criminalisation of politics, there was a solid and robust correlation between the media agenda of Aaj Tak and NDTV India. At the same time, a significant dissimilarity was found regarding obtrusive issues such as employment and inflation during the general elections of 2014. However, the obtrusive issues, *namely* inflation and employment, were less significant on the media agenda. In contrast, these two issues as the second and third most significant and prominent issues by most viewers of Aaj Tak and NDTV India. Since the viewers were facing the problem of scarcity of employment and rising commodities prices, they attached prominence to these issues despite lesser coverage given by the news media.

By comparing the slant and framing of news items/objects broadcast by Aaj Tak and NDTV India with the opinion of viewers of respective news channels, it was investigated that the views and opinions were in tune with slant and frames constructed by the news channels. Correspondingly, the unfavourable slants and anti-government framing set by both news channels were also reported by their respective viewers, thus reinforcing the media agenda. The majority of viewers were unfavourable to the then outgoing UPA-2 government. Thus, it can be concluded that television news channels not only tell us what to think about but also how to think about (Cohen, 1963).

This study has further revealed another significant finding: the NDTV India gave more favourable coverage (slant) and pro-governmental framing (treatment) to the then Congress-led UPA-2 government than the Aaj Tak on the six electoral issues selected for this present study. Adjacent to this, it was also found that Aaj Tak gave more neutral coverage than the NDTV India on the given issues during the general elections of 2014.

Another potential area for further research may be studying the role of contingent factors in strengthening or weakening the agenda-setting effect of news media. The roles of need for orientation, interpersonal Communication and conversation, obtrusive and concreteness of issues, among others in shaping public agenda, can further be substantiated with empirical evidence.



Since this study was conducted during the general elections of 2014, there lies the scope for more agenda-setting research works during the assembly elections in different states focussing on the issues concerning the state. Further, studies can be conducted during the non-election periods focusing on the role of print and electronic media in determining public opinion in the wake of special events and movements.

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