

Triadic Associations among Agendas of Media, Public, and Government A Long-term and Large-scale Empirical Evidence



Siqi Luo¹, Tianqianjin Lin¹, Weikang Yuan¹, Yifan Zhu², Cui Huang¹

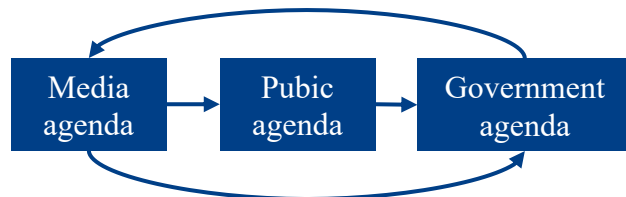
¹ Zhejiang University, ² Hangzhou Normal University

Introduction

- An **agenda** is a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at a point in time.
- In today's information ecosystem, there are **3 main involving actors**, which are **the media, the public and the government**.
- The formulation of agendas of different actors not only depends on their individual goals and beliefs but is also shaped by one another, which is commonly referred to as the **agenda-setting process**.
- Starting from a triadic perspective, this study leverages a long-term global event (COVID-19) as a case to investigate the agenda-setting process, uncovering **the triadic associations among the three actors**.

Background

The traditional agenda setting theory depicts the interrelationships of agendas as follows:



However, question arises to what extent these interrelationships can still fit in today's digital environment.

Gaps in literature

- Most focus on dyadic/pairwise relationships
- Lack of long-term empirical evidence

COVID-19 provided us with a unique opportunity to investigate the triadic associations at a long-term and large-scale level.

Research questions

- What are the agendas of the news media, the public, and the government regarding COVID-19 in China?
- What is the difference and relevance among the three agendas?
- What is the mechanism resulting in the difference and relevance?

Methodology

1.Data collection



newspaper articles on People's Daily



trending topics on Weibo



policies published by Chinese government

*using keyword "coronavirus" along with its variations to retrieve relevant results

2.Manual check

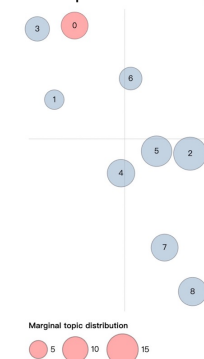


Irrelevant contents were discarded, resulting in

- 3720 newspaper articles on People's Daily
- 15089 trending topics on Weibo
- 888 policies

3.Agenda measurement

Intertopic Distance Map



Biterm topic model identified 9 issues. Mention frequencies of different issues were ranked as issue priorities, measuring different agendas of respective actors.

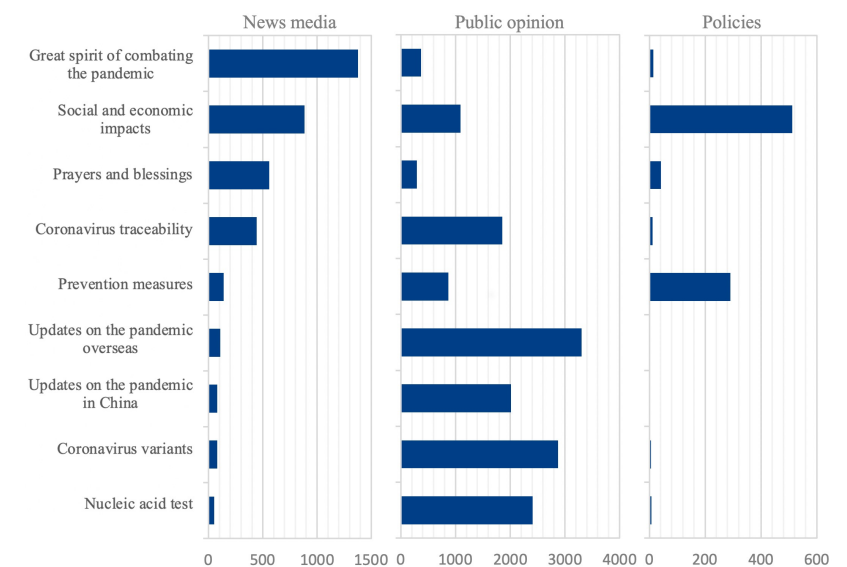
- (0) Social and economic impacts
- (1) Prayers and blessings
- (2) Updates on the pandemic overseas
- (3) Great spirit of combating the pandemic
- (4) Coronavirus traceability
- (5) Coronavirus variants
- (6) Prevention measures
- (7) Updates on the pandemic in China
- (8) Nucleic acid test

4.Correlation analysis

The Spearman rank correlation coefficients for the 9 issues by the three agenda setters were examined.

Results

Different agenda setting strategies: issues related to COVID-19 were mentioned to different degrees by the news media, the public and the policy.



Similar issues distribution: media agenda & policy agenda

Conflicting issues distribution: public agenda & media agenda, public agenda & policy agenda

| Agenda | News Media | Public Opinion | Policies |
|----------------|------------|----------------|----------|
| News Media | 1.000 | -0.733* | 0.717* |
| Public Opinion | -0.733* | 1.000 | -0.750* |
| Policies | 0.717* | -0.750* | 1.000 |

Conclusion and Discussion

- In alignment with the agenda setting theory, news media agenda shared similar issue attention with the policy agenda.
- While opposing to the agenda setting theory, the public agenda was not well matched with the media agenda and the policy agenda during the pandemic. The media appeared to act as both advocates and disseminators of the government agenda while probably opposing the public agenda.
- **Future work** will focus on elucidating the causal mechanisms that lead to the difference and relevance of their agenda setting process.