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## Agenda-setting function: A special reference to the Coalgate scam case

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### Abstract

This paper examines the role of media in agenda setting function of the coal gate scam and its coverage. As the CAG (comptroller and Auditor General) has published its report about the estimated loss of 1.860000 crore as the central govt. allocated coal mines to different companies. BJP and other opposition parties started a noisy campaign against the corruption nationwide. Baba Ramdev, Anna Hazare, and other civil society members started campaigning against corruption and central govt. as well. How 4 Indian National dailies dealt with the issue while covering the same. It is observed that all the four national dailies paid attention as expected from the media. The data is collected for the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

**Keywords:** Agenda setting, UPA, DJ (Dainik Jagran) DB (Dainik Bhaskar)

### Introduction

It's the media who contribute in making aware citizens, not the puppet of ruling political masters. So, in the case of citizens whose duty lies with them to develop good media habits. Media scholars arguably suggest that neither media nor citizens are capable of being handy to the political ecosystem. That's why the debate has been started from limited effects to agenda-setting functions. The limited effects approach argues that people may be influenced by media but the influence is probably very minimal. Agenda-setting research indicates that media not only tells people what to think, but it also tells the people to whom to think.

Communication scientists found that there is a covert relationship between what people read, watch, and hear and how they use that information. The development of measuring the effects of media on audience inspired some scholars to theorize the concept which tells that media not only informs us but also filters the information in such a way that we consider it as important as the salience assigned by media. Many studies suggest that media create an agenda for our attention and play a very important role in influencing the audience to varying degrees. When the given priority to any issue or event becomes the priority of the public is known as agenda setting function of the media. Even researchers found that dependency on the media of the individual, and society increases the chances of agenda-setting function. It will depend on the media and how the issue or event was emphasized.

The agenda-setting function requires a scientific qualitative and quantitative investigation. It has taken 40 years to come to this stage agenda-setting research has contributed a lot in increasing how media formed public opinion and influenced the public as accorded to media. But in the Indian context, agenda-setting research has been scarce. Few studies try to assess the relationship between the media system and the public.

The current study is another effort in this field. How agenda setting came into force depends upon the news, a process of converting events or issues into news. The processed items become the foundation on which the agenda-setting and public opinion research stands.

### Objective of the study

The current study aims to focus on the role of four national dailies in agenda-setting functions while covering the Coal Gate scam from the date when the 1<sup>st</sup> news was published in the various newspapers. The period of the study was one-month coverage of said issue.

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## Review of Literature

Keeping in view the theme of the current research, a review of related literature has been done as follows:

A panel study that was conducted by (Weaver *et al.* 1981)<sup>[13]</sup> in the 1976 election year investigated the influence of television and newspapers. The major finding of the study was the time frame for agenda-setting correlation ranged from 0 to Nine months. It is also noted that agenda-setting effects seem to be shifted in the political.

The study of Machuen and Coombs, 1981 investigated that media agendas are to those who are interested in politics. In other words, we can have this type of opinion that interest in politics makes somebody else rely on media to gain political knowledge increases the chance of agenda setting in case of lack of proper orientation.

Funk Houser (1973) conducted a longitudinal study of public agenda setting. He studied 14 major issues. His study discovered an association between the media agenda and the public agenda and a weak association between the public agenda and the media agenda.

Funkhouser also pointed out that the press is constrained by what is happening in the real world.

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Tichenor *et al.* (1975) throws light on the necessary action for a successful agenda-setting function. The study shows that the more media coverage about a topic the more the chance of public education/knowledge. The study showed the relationship between media coverage and education learned. Spanning around 17 years in another study (1960.77) they found that those who are interested in politics have similar agendas to the various media agendas.

McCombs (1976) noted that "the basic primitive notion of agenda-setting is a truism". The media tells us nothing about a topic or event, then in most cases, it simply will not exist

on our agenda or in our life space. One of the strongest examples of agenda setting is that the issues or events that are ignored by the media do not register on the public agenda. It is also found that although media sets agenda it does not affect all people equally. Where the public lacks information alternatives there is a greater possibility of agenda setting as there is a direct link between media agenda and public agenda.

Zucker (1978) found in their study that Unobtrusive issues which are direct and personal experiences by most individuals' salience on the media agenda led to public agenda salience for that item. Obtrusive issues mean with which people or audiences have greater familiarity, salience on the public agenda led to salience on the media agenda.

(Roberts & Maccoby, 1985) It is found in the said study that media agenda at the individual level leads to casual influence for at least some issues under some conditions. It also noted that variables like perceived source credibility, media habits, degree of competition social and political beliefs, and other contingent conditions either constrain or enhance the role of agenda-setting of media and the public.

## Research Design

While studying the media content, the content analysis method is employed. The study is conducted on four national dailies, two from Hindi, and two from English. The period for conducting the study is one month of continuous coverage of each daily from the date of happening of said event. The researcher has studied 9 variables which are as under:

1. Total column
2. Editorial
3. Placements on 1<sup>st</sup> page
4. Placements on 2<sup>nd</sup> page
5. Treatment as 1<sup>st</sup> lead
6. Treatment as 2<sup>nd</sup> lead
7. Anchor stories
8. Letter to Editor
9. Article published

**Table 1:** Showing the coverage of Coal Bloc scam case in four national dailies

	The Hindu	TOI	DB	DJ
Total columns	144	147	60	61
Editorials	3	4	2	3
Placement 1 <sup>st</sup> Page	12	13	5	0
Placement 2 <sup>nd</sup> Page	2	0	1	10
Treatment 1 <sup>st</sup> Lead	6	5	5	6
Treatment 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lead	3	1	2	1
Anchor Stories	0	0	0	0
Letters to Editor	29	0	0	0
Articles	2	3	1	1

## Results and Discussion

**Total columns:** When it comes to counting the number of columns published regarding the said issue, the data clearly shows that Indian media has given utmost importance to this issue by giving more space as compared to issues like reservation in promotion. The Hindu published 127 columns during a tenure of one month followed by TOI 78, Dainik Jagran 57, and the DB had given 34 columns space.

### Editorials

Editorials reflect the policy of any media house, likewise the opinion page reflects the opinion of any individual. None of

the newspapers covered this issue in a balanced way. DJ has published 7 editorials, followed by TOI 3, and The Hindu 2, whereas DB did not consider it worth publishing a single editorial in this regard. The interesting thing was that the matter was taken to the courts through the writs, but still, the media was in the mood to deliver justice instantly.

### Placement on 1<sup>st</sup> page

As the data given in the table shows Dainik Bhaskar, TOI, and The Hindu each published 7 news stories on the 1<sup>st</sup> page whereas DJ had given 6 news spaces on the front page.

**Placement on 2<sup>nd</sup> page:** As per the data shown in the table The Hindu and DJ published only 1 news on the second page, whereas the rest of the newspapers gave no space on the 2<sup>nd</sup> page to this issue.

**Treatment as 1<sup>st</sup> Lead:** The table indicates that The Hindu and TOI each published 6 news stories as 1<sup>st</sup> lead, whereas DB and DJ each had given 3 stories as 1<sup>st</sup> lead.

**Treatment as 2<sup>nd</sup> Lead:** The data under the 2<sup>nd</sup> lead news indicates that 2 news stories were appeared as 2<sup>nd</sup> lead in The Hindu, followed by TOI 1, whereas Dainik Bhaskar and Dainik Jagran given no space as 2<sup>nd</sup> lead to this issue.

**Anchor Stories:** The table given above indicates the data about Anchor stories. In the print media context, Anchor stories have special importance as they appear in boxes, that catch attention. But all the newspapers have no stories about the coal block scam.

**Letters to Editor:** The data in the table is quite interesting that newspapers were publishing only those letters to the editor, which are more speculative about the involvement of top congress leaders, which was yet to be proven. The Hindu had published 14 followed by TOI only had 4. DB and DJ have not given any space regarding the said issue.

**Articles:** Although articles are considered personal opinions. They too carry at least inclination towards any ideology. Either favoring or opposing any event/issue, a flow of information affects the people's perception. TOI and DJ each have published 2 articles that are keen to be held responsible for complete government rather than the ministry. The Hindu and DB each have also given 1 article on the said issue.

### Conclusion

Indian media have not been divided so clearly as today. Since the independence to date, the division has been multi-polar. Some media houses were of left orientation, some were revisionist and centrist as well. After the Anna movement against corruption in the presence of CAG reports, there has been some overt inclination towards right-wing politics. It's a fact that something like spark were there as most of the media persons hail from dominant caste or class groups. As media scholars indicate media not only alter the opinions but also maintain the status quo also. This paper is in the context of an agenda-setting framework. The Assumptions of that framework suggest that long-term exposure to the media content is likely to increase the chance of agenda setting which is prevalent in that scenario. Another assumption of the agenda-setting framework is that people tend to get influenced when there are fewer alternatives. There was no such penetration of social media in India in 2011. Even the network connectivity and availability were so poor. Hence people had limited choices while searching for the information. One more aspect regarding agenda-setting which coined out that the media agenda works more than the information is needed for political happening. Although the current research paper is aiming at the Coal block scam and its coverage but makes sense about the other media. The immense coverage of the Coal bloc scam has proved a new chapter in the previous issue of the 2G spectrum. Thus, it's proven that Indian voters

got incorporated with the information supplied by the media. After some years they even refused to believe the term notional loss and voted against the Congress.

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