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# THEORIES TO EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN, CONSTRUCTION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SOCIO-POLITICAL AGENDA

Javier Carreón Guillén<sup>1</sup>: National Autonomous University of Mexico  
[javierng@unam.mx](mailto:javierng@unam.mx)

Jorge Hernández Valdés: National Autonomous University of Mexico  
[jorheval@unam.mx](mailto:jorheval@unam.mx)

## ABSTRACT

The origin, construction and establishment of a socio-political agenda involves actors who do not necessarily relate directly, but use media to disseminate information about the topics of their agendas. In the case of the state, the media such as television, radio and newspapers are used to influence public opinion when evaluating public policy issue. Meanwhile, citizenship through social networks like Twitter and Facebook has influenced the practice of journalists. Thus, the influence of the media on public policy through public opinion has been exceeded. In this sense, the objective of this paper is to present the theoretical framework to explain the relationships between the actors involved in setting the public agenda. This exercise will discern modes of influence between the actors and the emergence and permanence of issues on the national agenda.

## KEYWORDS

Schedule - public policy - media - civil society - social networking.

# TEORÍAS PARA EXPLICAR EL ORIGEN, CONSTRUCCIÓN Y ESTABLECIMIENTO DE LA AGENDA SOCIOPOLÍTICA

## RESUMEN

El origen, construcción y establecimiento de una agenda sociopolítica implica actores que no necesariamente se relacionan directamente, sino que utilizan medios para difundir información acerca de los temas de sus agendas. En el caso del Estado, los medios de comunicación tales como televisión, radio y prensa son empleados para influir en la opinión ciudadana cuando de la evaluación de políticas públicas se trata.

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<sup>1</sup>Javier Carreón Guillén: National Autonomous University of Mexico [javierng@unam.mx](mailto:javierng@unam.mx)

Por su parte, la ciudadanía a través de las redes sociales como Twitter y Facebook ha influido en el ejercicio profesional de los comunicadores. De este modo, la influencia de los medios sobre las políticas públicas a través de la opinión pública ha sido rebasada. En este sentido, el objetivo del presente trabajo es exponer los marcos teóricos para explicar las relaciones entre los actores involucrados en el establecimiento de la agenda pública. Este ejercicio permitirá discernir los modos de influencia entre los actores y la emergencia o permanencia de temas en la agenda nacional.

## **PALABRAS CLAVE**

Agenda - políticas públicas - medios de comunicación - sociedad civil - redes sociales.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

An agenda is the result of the relationship between state and citizens in a context in which the media and information technologies transform reality in images rather than arguments.

The construction of an agenda entails the participation of stakeholders organized in networks and using technological devices to comment, discuss, analyze, criticize and propose alternative contents to those issued by groups or elites in power.

The establishment of the agenda is the final result of the proliferation of issues surrounding the public that were previously disseminated in the media and commented on information technology.

A sociopolitical agenda is a conglomerate of speeches, issues and technologies designed to transform public opinion into sympathizers, supporters, activists and political dissidents who occupy the available space to express their support for a political system, form of government, form of state, political class, partisan or public policy option as the solution to social problems that often require a result from the distribution of common resources.

## **2. OBJECTIVES**

In this sense, the objective of this paper is to present the theoretical framework to explain the relationships between the actors involved in setting the public agenda. This exercise will discern modes of influence between the actors and the emergence and permanence of issues on the national agenda.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The construction of a socio-political agenda involves processing of symbols that start from a collective memory, pass through social representations, attitudes toward political systems and power fields.

The establishment of the sociopolitical agenda involves the emergence of stakeholders who appear as dissidents to the regime and question topics brought to discussion by the groups in power. However, this process becomes absolute when

the criticism and expressions of dissatisfaction are absent. In that sense, the information technologies rather than media inhibit innovation and promote conformity and obedience.

Setting the agenda includes dimensions for analysis which would be:

- Economic crises; slowdown and recession of production and consumption and scarcity of natural resources and the emergence of criminal groups.
- government regimes and state forms that define the relationships with members, supporters, dissidents and opponents.
- Absence or presence of groups and dissidents for competition for political power.
- Political ideology, either partisan or sectoral, and its dissemination in the forums for debate.
- legal framework for the dissemination of information in the media.
- Access to information and communication technologies, especially the Internet and virtual forums.
- Organization of civilian areas into citizen observatories and vulnerable, marginalized or media-excluded groups, information technology, social networking or discussion forums.
- Formation of public opinion from those factors that are put forth and their influence on governmental decisions through media and technologies.
- Synthesis of citizen opinion in symbols and meanings tailored to governmental decisions. Issuance of information on topics of citizen-related. media-based, political and national agenda.
- Emergency of entrepreneurship by stakeholders and social networks. Or rather, continuance of conformity and obedience that prevents its replacement with innovation and alternative proposals to public policies.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Theory of Social Representations**

A social representation alone would be a set of affective, emotional, cognitive and behavioral variables aimed at a group construction of knowledge. However, social representations are rather a historical context in which a variety of symbols, meanings and senses aimed at training, development or extinction of a group in relation to information management converge (Jodelet, 2011). It is everyday knowledge that results in speeches, beliefs and stereotypes inherent to any group or they are prototypical categorizations influenced by majority and minority identities. One way or another, they are interpretive structures of reality and therefore occur in communication styles and semiotic interpretation of reality. Once transformed into speech, social representations become a social thought delimited by an object, group, society or culture, but they can also be social knowledge about ambiguity and information dissemination. We can see that this holistic aspect of social representations considers discursive levels where knowledge management is accomplished with less symbolic resources and more affection. Meanwhile, the structural dimension of social representations believes that diversity of everyday life is rationally processed to give a sense of order to it and define

personal actions against collective constructions. Even social representations are opposed, according to this approach, to scientific knowledge, although they may have derived from it. It is information processed in symbols that allow us to adjust individual behavior in collective communication styles. This process involves groups as long as elements of communication exist.

However, the construction of symbols for communication and practical action derive from the media, besides being observable through language, groups construct discourses that differentiate them from other audiences. In this sense, values are indicators of social representation of a media object and its becoming symbols (Marina, 2010). This implies the incidence of group norms on values, beliefs and opinions that are disseminated in the media. That is, the influence of the media involves the interpretation of its content by reference to hearings in other contexts such as the environment, family or school.

A third aspect ensures that social representations are reality-organizing systems regardless of the source of information or processing, they structure and order reality. This process indicates a dual relationship between individuals and information as not only contents are reproduced into processed symbols, but also information is produced by more complex relationship. In other words, social representations give meaning to personal, interindividual and group reality (Velazquez Gutierrez & Quijano, 2013). This suggests that social representations are summarized in constructs or inventions of reality against which people take an innovative approach as it not only allows its influence but, when interpreting information, they diversify it further (Barrios, 2013). If you also add the communicative and discursive process, then we have that social representations are practical symbols to intervene in everyday life (Barriga, Correa & Figueroa, 2013).

In short, holistic, structuralist and systemic dimension of social representations agrees that these are external to the individual, although the information is processed internally. Moreover, it allows a link between the groups and people in such a way that reality is deductively or inductively processed, but it is definitely a means of human interaction.

Since networks of knowledge management are understood, from the Theory of Social Representations, as symbols that link individual knowledge and process them according to group needs and expectations against academic and technological discourses that overlap them in exchange of information.

In addition, knowledge networks would be more than a simple translation of specific content in everyday applications, is the intrusion of symbols on individuals so that their decisions and actions are geared to the interests of those who make information and establish discussion topics through the media.

In the case of public universities, it will be possible to see that the social representations of scientific knowledge are disseminated by networks that act as filters of information and communication specialists to students. In this process symbols are not only shared but they are differentially represented from the capitals that each individual in particular and groups usually possess.

Being information filters, knowledge networks not only spread content but also use management mechanisms leading to diversify teaching and learning of contents. In

the case of public universities, knowledge is available to the community for the purpose of being reproduced, questioned or innovated.

This is a public process in which symbols are treated as assets and, therefore, meanings of those who possess, transfer or translate them. This is where the social representations emerge as stages of objectification and anchoring.

The objectification involves the symbolic representation of an educational, scientific or technological process. As ICT are mostly consumed by the academic community, the updated information acquires public relevance because, for example, a desertion or a finding are disseminated through information devices.

Precisely, the second anchoring process is the one that explains the conversion of a simple fact or event in a public discussion through knowledge networks. The anchor is the establishment of a meaning into symbols that, due to their social relevance, have been assimilated and discussed in academic forums.

Thus, symbols related to meanings set representations that, when being disseminated, discussed, and conceptualized, become social representations. In this sense, knowledge management not only involves bringing together specialists but also requires their distribution within the groups of knowledge. In addition, as the contents of any order are affordable to the university community, they are a source of representations, not only means, that facilitate, inhibit or determine knowledge.

The advent of symbols and meanings regarding a community suggests the production or reproduction not only of knowledge but also the emergence of perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, skills, decisions and behaviors. In the stated order, knowledge management in a public university goes through stages ranging from production to reproduction of specialized information exposed to the scrutiny of the university community.

Knowledge management starts with the objectification of information so that, once naturalized, it is anchored to the daily life of the community. This process emerges from values, standards and academic traditions that allow emergence of themes and contents which will eventually be converted into specialized information that is central in the social representations of both management and knowledge itself.

Indeed, social representations include two dimensions, a central one and a peripheral one from which information is stored in the core once it has been fragmented, analyzed, discussed and conceptualized in the peripheral zone. That is, the structure of knowledge management, from the Theory of Social Representations, refers to two levels of access to information, production and reproduction.

The interrelationship between the core and the periphery affects knowledge management since decisions aimed at the production, distribution, reproduction, criticism and innovation are categories that distinguish the social representations of other processes inherent in knowledge management.

However, knowledge production, unlike the reproduction of academic content, has a different dynamics because, while specialized information is produced, the reading and translation of those contents may be more immediate. While knowledge production requires an academic naturalization consisting of the presentation of findings to the scientific and technological community. The two final ones are those that will define the entrance of the new content in the university agenda.

In short, knowledge management ranges from production to reproduction and tends to emit symbols that, being shared by a community, inhibit or facilitate the emergence of meanings. Evidence of this process of social representations is found in the pooling of knowledge and on the periphery of the issues discussed within the university community. In the core, contents are considered to be classics of education, science and technology while, at the periphery, issues are assumed as a working hypothesis that can aspire to be incorporated into the core of knowledge. To do this, assumptions must pass through an objectification, naturalization and anchorage because they will be treated as discursive symbols and interpretive meanings of the groups that produce, discuss or reproduce.

If it is a question of discursive groups, then the theory of discursive fields offers the axes of analysis leading to an explanation of why the scientific findings or educational problems are transformed into central or peripheral symbols according to their degree of relevance to the academic community.

#### **4.2 Theory of Setting the Agenda**

Production, management and reproduction of knowledge are linked to the establishment of an academic agenda. In a way, information is transformed into central themes of discussion by the media. The gap between scientists and readers is reduced by the interference of the media. In principle, the scientific findings are biased or reduced as the dissemination of science widens the spectrum of readers as it simplifies its contents of knowledge production (Maric, 2012). That is, the media assume that readers are neophytes in scientific subjects and thus frequently simplify the contents and apply them to an everyday activity. This phenomenon is known as agenda setting because the topics are selected by the media and transferred to their audiences in the form of reports, news, columns or programs.

Setting the agenda is not exclusively aimed at the civil spheres as academic communities are also likely to be influenced by seminars, symposiums, conferences, meetings, workshops, conferences or seminars currently transmitted through the official channels of universities or through student channels (Fernandez, 2012). Besides, the gazettes, weekly newspapers or newspapers of universities also promote, synthesize or criticize events in which scientific advances are presented. Media into the interior of universities also build public opinion by biasing the contents and emitting only a part of them to the student or academic community.

The establishment of the agenda requires representations, fields, habitus, capitals, attitudes, skills, stakeholders and networks around the production, management and reproduction of knowledge.

The media of universities assume that the academic and student community will be interested only in certain topics that can be seen precisely in the central core of social representations of scientific knowledge. Or, the coverage of the university media is also focused on those emerging issues that are peripheral to the scientific agenda (Alvarez, 2012).

It is content broadcast by groups in power that determine, through speeches, the axes of discussion and the points to be debated. In this sense, the fields in power serve as

scenarios for discursive contest in which the university media tip the balance towards certain topics (Fortich and Moreno, 2012).

Meanwhile, acquired habitus, knowledge established through university media generate provisions in academic and student communities to guide the construction of a university agenda.

The media are the ones that extol cultural resources and repertoires of discourse groups in power. Formation of symbolic capitals cannot be explained without the intervention of the media that, in college, work as official voice of the most renowned mentioned or honored scientists.

Receiving the information disseminated in the media is categorized in areas of value to guide consumption decisions of the scientific findings more presented in the media. Hardly a scientific discovery would be assayed by a community without the intervention of some media. In this process, the formation of emotional rather than rational attitudes is present in the student and academic communities. The media extol findings that students and teachers will later assimilate to support their integration into the university agenda.

The dissemination of scientific findings opens the discussion on their reproduction and the skills required for their effective transfer to the audiences of college media (Borjas, 2011). Often, scientific contents require efficient, effective and effective powers to simplify the information, assign a daily application and justify their inclusion in the university agenda. It requires skills that reproduce knowledge from the scientific findings that media broadcast.

However, there are filler contents that can lead to the role of dissident groups in the promotion of science and technology into a university. They are actors willing to innovate in order to be visible to the audience. In these cases, the media also have an important function as they minimize their dissenting arguments to maximize the logic of power groups.

In short, the establishment of a university agenda involves emergency contents and peripherals topics to the social representations of scientific, academic and student communities. It has underlying discursive fields of power, it is acquired in the form of habitus and confined to repertoires and cultural heritages from which affective attitudes that do not question the power structure or the establishment of a university agenda occur. However, the formation of professional skills is opposed to the emergence of dissident stakeholders and improvisation networks that threaten the establishment of the agenda.

### **4.3 Entrepreneurship Theory**

A consequence of the uncertain, risky and uncertain contexts is entrepreneurship. Being observed in organizations when there is a decline in production or human relations, entrepreneurship is the result of a series of events that highlight the relationship of trust, commitment, loyalty, affinity, empathy and innovation (Botero Alvarez & Gonzalez, 2012). Entrepreneurship is understood as a set of values, standards, beliefs, perceptions, skills, decisions and actions aimed at achieving goals and objectives as the resources to reach them become scarce (Cardon, Gregoire, Stevens & Patel, 2013).

Entrepreneurship allows us to differentiate the conformist groups from innovators. In a situation of scarcity and crisis of results, conformist individuals adhere to established guidelines while dissidents produce divergent ideas to organizational structures and group standards (Cerrón, 2010). Another substantial difference is the formation of innovative minorities against the majority, conformist and orthodox groups. Organizational problems that inhibit the production and reproduction of knowledge management are often approached by orthodox groups from their resources and capabilities (Gordon, Exhaust & Rubio, 2011). Instead, innovative minorities generate different behaviors because their decisions are carried out from the dissent. While the majority groups seek profit and gain, minority groups pursue lifestyles that identify them with their economic, political and social situation (Danes & Juyoung, 2013). However, entrepreneurship is not only a product of the establishment of the agenda, it is primarily a reverse process to the established themes as they represent objectives contrary to the social and group standards, traditions and local customs (Diaz & Hernandez Roldan, 2012). Entrepreneurship is a lifestyle that produces knowledge and new information as contrasted with the dissemination of subjects set by the political spheres. In that sense, it is paradoxical that information technologies arise from innovative ideas which are then adjusted to market requirements and public policy (Hallak, Brown & Lindsay, 2012). That is why the main indicator of setting the agenda is the emergence of entrepreneurship, as social spheres are inserted into a dynamic of scarcity and competition for resources (Hazlina, Mohd & Rohaida, 2012). An agenda that does not produce enterprising individuals is doomed to be replaced by another because innovation is essential for the State to relate to society (Jyoti & Jyoti, 2011). In the case of public security that, for the purposes of this study, is socially represented as perceptions of insecurity, the findings reported in the state of knowledge point out that the State puts its economic interests before the xenophobia of social groups that attribute offenses to migrants. The dispute between local authorities and xenophobic organizations unveiled the tendency of the press regarding the legalization of migrants so they could work in foreign investment projects. The revival of economy in a context of crisis makes the state, rather than inhibit migration, promote its incorporation into riskier jobs. Being instruments of political power, public policies are spread by the communication channels to be questioned in one case and be accepted in another case. That is, the issues of economic order seem to overcome local interests that, in the case of academic and student communities, penetrate its sphere of representations in such a way that the issue of privatization is more important than safety or environmental conservation. Indeed, in the study on the establishment of a water agenda, the authorities implemented alternative distribution of irrigation water and rates and to encourage the political participation of public service users. Beyond the shortages in some neighborhoods, local residents developed frugal life styles that complemented the

alternative distribution of irrigation water and even the increased tariffs. Regarding the inclusion of virtual social networks and discussion forums on the Internet, the papers reported in the state of knowledge highlight the role of information technology in contrast to the functions of the media. It is a process in which the formation of provisions indicates habits to consume information that are transferred from the core of the social discourse to the discursive periphery of the groups promoting the discussion topics. The formation of discursive spaces entails that the social representations more rooted in the political class around social have become perceptions, beliefs and values that enable the dissemination of knowledge in the form of images rather than arguments. In this phase, the construction of an agenda becomes more complicated because images carry feelings and emotions that can discourage audiences from consuming information or make their positions and requests for information more radical. However, after the media and information technologies have been responsible for diversifying the information to such an extent that the reader of newspapers focuses on photos, the consumer of television program focuses his interest in fictional characters, the radio listener emphasizes the phrases of communicators or the user of twitter and facebook comments on the moods of his contacts, then setting an agenda has entered its terminal phase. Lack of discussion as well as the emergence of group codes dispelled agenda items and transformed them into inert matter for deliberation. It is the final stage of setting the agenda indicated by the absence of analysis, criticism and synthesis of information.

However, there are still some processes that affect the construction of issues. Such is the case of identity, helplessness of influence as side effects of categorization of images, words, phrases and speeches about set topics. The identity has been studied as a phenomenon and process of the groups that share a sense of belonging, lifestyle and use of resources. Symbolic capital formation is affected by decisions that favor one group over another. The deliberation of issues is determined by the choice of actions that fall within a group. Even the use of devices is founded on membership in a group. In the case of social influence, major groups had also been targeted by minority groups. The majority decisions also become relevant against the behavioral styles of minorities. In fact, the establishment of an agenda is a phenomenon of influence of a minority over the majority. So the power of minority decisions goes across social structures, information contours and social representations. Finally, helplessness is the main result of the critical situations through which the groups are subdued. Hopelessness is a product of setting the agenda for dissident or alternative groups to the themes that dominate in the media, as the official information intensifies, it fosters feelings of helplessness in those groups opposed to the regime.

In the future, setting an agenda will focus not on the issues or the stakeholders or technologies but it will rather consist of the relationship of images and everyday experiences. A greater proximity between symbols and memories, there will be greater personal satisfaction and, at the same time, social disengagement, but this

experience is lived through shared technologies. The relationship between rulers and users will run from technologies capable of processing initiatives and real-time laws given the electoral preferences of users. Political systems will be perceived as corollaries of collective decisions that may be settled in a matter of seconds thanks to the hologrammatic conversion of the vote, rally, plebiscite or public scrutiny. Economic, political, environmental or social reforms will be established as adjacent topics to personal comfort to the detriment of the community, especially those vulnerable, marginalized or excluded-from-information-networks sectors. In the future, the relations between elites will have sucked majorities and minorities. Governance of these elites will no longer require the establishment of an agenda, or the construction of collective issues, but it rather will depend on the energy supply needed by technologies to implement the decisions made from personal comfort.

## 5. CONCLUSION

An agenda is the result of the relationship between state and citizens in a context in which the media and information technologies transform reality in images rather than arguments. The construction of an agenda entails the participation of stakeholders organized in networks and using technological devices to comment, discuss, analyze, criticize and propose alternative contents to those issued by groups or elites in power. The establishment of the agenda is the final result of the proliferation of issues around the public opinion that were previously disseminated in the media and commented on the information technologies. A sociopolitical agenda is a conglomerate of speeches, issues and technologies designed to transform public opinion into sympathizers, supporters, activists and political dissidents who occupy the available space to express their support for a political system, form of government, political class, partisan option or public policy as the solution to social problems that often require results for the distribution of common resources. The construction of a socio-political agenda involves processing of symbols that start from a collective memory, pass through social representations and attitudes toward political systems and power fields. The establishment of the sociopolitical agenda involves the emergence of stakeholders who appear as dissidents to the regime and question topics brought to discussion by the groups in power. However, this process becomes absolute when the criticism and expressions of dissatisfaction are absent. In that sense, the information technologies, rather than the media, inhibit innovation and promote conformity and obedience.

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