

POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIA OPERATIONS IN NIGERIA

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF
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23 The Gatekeeping and Agenda-building Process in Media Production

Kayode Lambe Mustapha

Introduction

Information is a common currency of any society from the time immemorial. The Industrial Revolution, however, changed the mode of information dissemination and appropriation among the people, conferring on the mass media the role of clearing house between information disseminators and information recipients. This unique mediating power of the media could be located in functionalist approach to understanding media roles in the society offered by Harold Lasswell (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010).

Now known as the Lasswellian roles of the media, the functionalist approach sees the media performing surveillance, correlation and cultural transmission roles (DeFleur, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Sparks, 2006). Subsequently, scholars also confer on the media other roles such as entertainment, mobilisation, status conferring, norms enforcing and, of course, narcotising dysfunction (Burton, 2005; McQuail, 2010).

Undoubtedly, the power inherent in the media also earned it the Fourth Estate of the Realm, on equal pedestal with other powerful Estates; open marketplace of ideas; the watchdog and the public sphere, where ideas are tested and contested (Baran & Davis, 2012; Burton, 2005; DeFleur, 2010; Dennis & Merrill, 2002; Folarin, 2005; McQuail, 2010, Sparks, 2006).

The belief that there is no other information avenue that is as magisterial as the mass media system has made the public sphere to become the darling of powerful elite class and the commoners who need the platform to respectively reinforce ideology and get orientation about the momentaneous external environment (Croteau & Hoynes, 2005, 2012; Mustapha, 2012).

Media professionals also obtain some degree of respect, garlands and accolades from functioning as processors and packagers of information that serves as the

life blood of the society (Mustapha, Ahmad & Abubakar, 2014). The process of media production is, however, complex, demanding and intriguing in view of the quantum of facts and evidences that must be packaged into readily digestible information for the masses.

Besides dearth of time and space to accommodate the avalanche of information, there is equally limitation in the capacity of members of the audience to grapple with behemoth content aiming at informing, educating, entertaining and persuading them (McCombs, 2004; Mustapha & Wok, 2015b).

This reality thus requires of media professionals to coordinate the information processing and dissemination in a routine manner known as gatekeeping mechanism, defined as "a process of filtering and selecting pieces of information into a limited number of messages, which then reach an audience and act as a center of the media's role in public life" (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 10).

Media of all types gathered information globally, but have to filter the information to select and prioritise it based on perceived salience and audience interest. The gatekeeper or gatekeepers thus fix the range of information considered relevant to the audience via hierarchical sorting of issues considered to be topical and controversial (Safdar, Imran, Mumtaz & Anjum, 2015).

In addition to media professionals applying certain principles and norms to information selection and distribution, other concerned parties who are interested in getting information across to the mass audience also explore and exploit routinised media practices of prominence, proximity, consequence, etc. to pull information through the media 'gates'. This application of media logic allows political and corporate elites as well as activists to build agenda that the mass media eventually set for the public and policy makers (Burton, 2005; Curran, 2002).

Agenda building can, therefore be considered as a form of media gatekeeping function from backward integration perspective. "The broader concept of agenda building explicates the process of salience formation as one involving several stakeholder groups beyond news media and public opinion, including government, political parties, candidates, organizations, activist groups, and so forth" (Kiousis, Kim, McDevitt & Osfrowski, 2009, p. 545).

While the processes of agenda building and gatekeeping are happening as a continuum from the time immemorial, the mode has changed in response to the nature of media ecology. From personal press through partisan, penny and commercial press (Rystrom, 1994), different persona have functioned as agenda builders and gatekeepers. Contemporary commercialised media system, responding to the vagaries of neoliberal capitalistic system also features differing agenda building and gatekeeping mechanisms (Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Perse, 2001).

Added to the change wrought on these information dissemination management systems of the mass media is unending dynamism of media system architecture, fuelled by advanced information and communication technologies. Hence, these two theories, guiding how information usually channelled to the mass

audience is being sourced and packaged, are facing challenge of relevance and sustainability. This chapter, therefore, intends to provide panoramic trajectories of these important theoretical positions in an information-dependent society.

Agenda Building and Gatekeeping as a Continuum

The mass media space offers members of the public the opportunity to perceive the external reality that is out of reach, out of touch and out of direct acquaintances (Lippmann, 1922). The reality construction role of the mass media became fundamental since industrial revolution, when mechanical solidarity that offered citizens needed instruction and information from communitarian viewpoint was replaced by organic solidarity of urbanised atomistic audience (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009).

Charged with the responsibility of catering for the information, orientation and entertainment needs of teeming audience uprooted from their traditional rural bases to the urban centres, the media struggled to package humongous information at their disposal to meet the critical needs that their audience wants gratified. As a system that primed objectivity as its operating ideology, therefore, the media depend mostly on the third parties to lend credibility to their content, particularly regarding their primary role of news (Stovall, 2015). The need for the mass media to source information from different avenues results in a symbiotic relationship between agenda building and gatekeeping functions.

Agenda building emerged from the heurism of agenda setting theory via the question who sets the media agenda? In a bid to ground agenda setting effects as occurring out of bias of the media professional to forcefully condition audience attention to certain issues, it was discovered that the agenda being promoted are built by those interested in what becomes the public opinion climate (McCombs, 2004, 2005). These interested parties include government officials, political parties and politicians, corporate organisations, causes' promoters and activists, among others.

Referencing Berkowitz and Adams' (1990) study, Kiousis, Kim, McDevitt and Osfrowski (2009) submit that public relations professionals have become principal information sources for journalists through their information subsidies, in terms of news releases and political advertisements, which aimed at shaping news agenda as information subsidies reduce the cost of gathering information by the journalists. This means that the information to be gated by media professionals substantially emanated from promoters of ideas that use the media platforms to make those ideas become common knowledge.

The relationship between agenda building and gatekeeping is reinforced by contemporary corporate and commercialised media system that tower profit over public interest (Bagdikan, 1997; Couldry, Livingstone & Markham, 2007; Mustapha, Ahmad & Abubakar, 2014). Known as era of PRization of news, contemporary media content are dominated by sponsored rather than professionally sourced

information (Baran & Davis, 2012; Tench & Yeomans, 2009) with the aim of reinforcing ideology that support capitalistic enterprises (Frith & Mueller, 2003; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Sheffield, 2006).

This allows public relations practitioners to use information subsidies such as media access, news releases, statements, news conferences and other media production underwriting techniques to build agenda that eventually define the cognition of members of the media audience about issues of public concern. Although agenda building and gatekeeping functions are both instrumental to how issues originate and how they are made to become salient in audience perceptions, they operate differently and are affected by differing contingent conditions.

Agenda Building Process and Effects

Agenda building is the process of influencing media constructed realities by powerful and credible news sources. Primarily media professionals source news using the real world indicators and information from credible sources, observed events or archival materials. The reliance on sources other than personally-observed event or stored-sources (Stovall, 2015) empowers agenda builders to communicate messages of interest to a vast audience via the media space.

Agenda building, therefore, is the ability of media sources to obtain space and time in the media for their information thus influencing media agenda and ultimately the public agenda (Curtin, 1999; Kiousis & Wu, 2008). In Kim and Kiousis' (2012) words, agenda building is the ability of organisations to raise the saliency of issues they intend to communicate.

Different from agenda setting that sought to elevate the perceived importance of issues affecting the society by conferring status on such events and issues via primal media placement (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Mustapha & Wok, 2015a), agenda building is concerned with the exploration of origin of issues in the media discourses. This makes the agenda building to be limited to the relationship between sources of news and writers of news as opposed to agenda setting that connect the media with the audience.

Scholars have a broader view about agenda building, describing it as a macro level theorisation delving into how issues arrest the attention of policy and decision makers. From the political science tradition, agenda building deals with the process by which issues become salient in the public and policy arena (Cobb & Elder, 1971; Cobb, Ross & Ross, 1976).

Cobb, Ross and Ross (1976, p. 126), for example, submit that "the study of agenda building requires an understanding of the ways in which different subgroups in a population become aware of and eventually participate in political conflicts, whether the issues are initiated by groups in the general public or by political leaders". Lang and Lang (1983, pp. 58-59) define agenda-building as: "A

collective process in which media, government, and the citizenry reciprocally influence one another".

Cassara (1998, p. 480) provides a brilliant encapsulation of agenda building process. According to this scholar, "agenda building focuses on how news media interactions with sources of news influence the media agenda. These interactions are shaped by competition between news organizations, news handing practices and routines, and the influence of issue interest groups".

This shows that agenda building is a process and a product of power relations between those interested in moulding social reality and those charged with the responsibility of queuing vast majority of the audience to plethora of events that cannot be apprehended and comprehended via first-hand or direct encounters. Three major sources of agenda building earlier identified by Weaver, McCombs, and Shaw (2004) include the presidents and political elites, elite media sources and social norms and traditions of journalism that depend on the real world indicators that support what to report.

Via news releases, campaign speeches, State of the Union address and other forms of rhetoric, it has been found that both incumbent president and other political elites contribute to building agenda of the media (Cummins, 2010; Rex, 2011; Sheafer & Weimann, 2005; Wirth, Matthes & Schemer, 2010). Similarly, during election times, candidates ensure that they dominate the media space in order to push agenda that could really sway voters to their sides (Damore, 2004; Fico & Freedman, 2001; Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu & Seltzer, 2006).

Besides presidents and politician, elite media also alter the contours of the issues that get played up in the media due to their leadership role as well as professional and cultural capital. Via routine reliance on other media, particularly the elite ones, media organisations achieve "consonance, standardisation, news coherence, conformity, homogeneity, or new convergence (Carsten, 2004).

This routine reliance keep media organisation in the news environment and market that is highly competitive. Hence, it is not uncommon to see local media organisations looking up to national ones due to capacity, credibility, and economies of scale differentials. Other studies on inter-media agenda building have documented the effects of political advertisements on news agenda of print and broadcast news (McCombs, 2004; Sinkaku, 2011).

In addition to the 'elitist approach' to agenda building, epitomised by dominant effects of towering political figures and media institutions, journalistic routine of objectively reporting facts using evidence and credible sources is also an important approach to agenda building and agenda setting: "Journalistic norms call for reporters to explicitly attribute information and to follow standards for impartiality" (Fico & Freedman, 2001, p. 438). This means that internalised routines as well as social control of the news room is also paramount in building agenda into the media sphere.

Peiser (2000) adds another dimension to agenda building calculus through what he calls personal agendas of journalists. According to him, news rooms' diversity and systemic variation among journalists could lead to personal agendas, which could influence their news judgment and, by extension, the media content.

In sum, agenda building process and effects are part and parcel of news management dynamics that structure what eventually makes it to the public space and alter audience perceptions of reality. The efforts of agenda builders would, however, only materialised if those charged with the responsibility selecting what makes it to the media space, the gatekeepers, consider their inputs as worthy of being published as news.

Gatekeeping as Holistic Mechanism

According to Shoemaker and Vos (2009, p. 1) gatekeeping is the process of "culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people every day." Being a mid-20th century expression, gatekeeping is the special responsibility of the media to select worthy news that would guide ordinary citizens in making informed political, cultural and economic decision. In deed Vos and Finneman (2016, p. 1)surmise that "determining what is worthy to be cast as news have been central to claims about the unique place of the institution of journalism in the public sphere".

Heinderyckx and Vos (2016) provide an elaborate conceptualisation of gate keeping. According to them, gatekeeping has had a variety of meanings: There is the concept of gatekeeping, which means that not all information is available to all persons:

> A gatekeeping function, which refers to social, physical, and digital realities that inhibit or advance the flow of information; a gatekeeping role, the normative duties of certain actors in information environment who pass and restrict certain forms of information; a gatekeeping model, a plot identifying aspects of the social, physical, and digital world that shape the flow of information; and gatekeeping theory that offers explanation on how social institution, socialisation, organisational norms and human characteristics bear influence on patterns of news production and reception.

Scholars have also come up with a number of factors that determine representation in and access to the media in tandem with power differentiation of social groups (Croteau, 2014; Croteau & Hoynes, 2005, 2012; Golding & Murdock, 1996; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Shoemaker & Resse, 1996).

The scholarly perspectives that emanated from divergent prisms from which gatekeeping roles are being actualised have led to consideration of people outside the news circle as shadow gatekeepers. In essence, media content is subject to

definition intended by parties interested in shaping reality in conformity with their preconceived worldviews.

In *Mediating the Message*, a work that provided an elaborate insight into influences on media content, Shoemaker and Reese (1996) provide abundant anecdotal evidences on how different media outlets' reportage of the same issue sometimes differs in terms of facts, contexts, frames and elaboration. Most importantly, they surmised that factors such as "the personal attitudes and orientations of media workers; professionalism; the economic environment; advertisers; and ideological influences" (p. 4) are responsible for the colouration of quantitative and qualitative texts/codes distributed by the mass media.

Other scholars examined how the social world in which media production takes place impinges on the content using economic, political, organizational, professional and societal groups' inequalities as key variables (Croteau, 2014; Croteau & Hoynes, 2005, 2012).

From critical school of thought of neo-Marxist hue, media content is view as a resultant of exercise of and in power. Scholars in this paradigm believe that what makes it to the media space reflects the ideology of the elites of political and corporate classes.

Golding and Murdock (1996) classical *Culture, Communications and Political economy* explicates the interplay between symbolic and economic dimensions of public communication and how "different ways of financing and organizing cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and representations in public domain and for audience access to them" (pp.11-12).

These critical scholars opine that the influence of the elite on media content was bolstered by triumph of neoliberal capitalistic economic system, which brought about the growth of the media, extension of corporate reach, commodification of news and culture and changing role of state and government intervention.

In a more polemical format, Herman and Chomsky's (2002) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, provides a radical understanding of how media content is used to maintain status quo by using it to propagandise on behalf of the elite class. These iconoclastic political economists provide a propaganda model that explains how structural and institutional mechanisms fix the premise of what comes to be known about external reality by the masses. In their words:

> A propaganda model focuses on inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public.

According to them, any message that would be considered worthy of mass dispersion must pass through five filters of the size, ownership and profit orientation; advertising acting as both underwriter as well as undertaker of media organisation; reliance on sources, government and corporate experts, who are agents of power; 'flak', the ability to discipline the media via regulation, litigation and legislative mechanisms; and anticommunism, now replaced with ideological force such as miracle of the market.

Although Herman and Chomsky's work used extensive case studies that indicted the American media system as elite ideological vessel, it has appeal in virtually every country of the world given the pre-eminence of capitalistic ideology as the underbelly of contemporary corporatised media system.

Transitions in Agenda Building and Gatekeeping Processes

It should be noted that the theoretical constructs of agenda building and gatekeeping have antiquated origin; however they have been modified by evolving contingencies, particularly with regards to the evolutionary nature of the media landscape.

While the two approaches to unpacking media content production have their genesis in the tradition/legacy media, their efficacy has become a subject of controversy in the contemporary media ecology that is diffusing and devolving the power over information collection, processing, dissemination and consumption.

For this reason, some scholars believe that the new media ecology will render impotent the traditional flow of power in mediation and mediatisation of issues, events and activities (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Schoenbach, De Waal & Lauf, 2005), while others conclude that the power to shape the news would only be re-invented to accommodate the dynamics of the contemporary media space (Coleman, McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 2009; Maier, 2010; McCombs, 2005; Mustapha & Wok, 2015a).

To begin with agenda building theoretical tradition, findings at the outset posited that content of the media and their placements are by-products of power relations between bigger media outlets and the smaller organisations who naturally pick agenda of the elitist media on the one hand as well as efforts to control issues in the public domain by political office holders, politicians, corporate communicators, issue-based activists, among others (Andrews & Caren, 2010; Cohen, 2004; Messner & Garrison, 2011).

Using various forms of information subsidies, issues promoters exploit media routine of mediating, rather than creating, the message to influence the saliency of the issues as well as the contexts that provide understanding of the issues (Kiousis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007). In effect, media only serve as the conduits through which dominant news sources define reality that is perceived by members of the public.

Agenda-building as an offshoot of agenda-setting research (McCombs, 2004; Kim & Kiousis, 2012) has thus yielded a number of researches validating its

assumptions (Kim & Kiousis, 2012; Noije, Kleinnijenhuis & Oegema, 2008; Sweatser & Brown, 2008). Besides testing its core assumption of transference of issue salience from sources' agenda to the media agenda, agenda building has also been tested at its second-level/attribute level of effects, where the properties defining the issues being promoted are correspondingly used in filling out the issues in news stories (Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu & Seltzer, 2006). This means that attributes associated with any given issue by agenda builders are also prominently used to describe and elaborate the issue in the media.

The contemporary media ecology that is witnessing collaborative story-telling and civic journalistic practices in the age of Web 2.0 has also become an important precondition in the exploration of agenda building process and effects. In this adventure, scholars are exploring inter-media agenda building mechanism between the mainstream/legacy media and the novel new media (Bajkiewicz, Kraus & Hong, 2011; Cohen, 2004; Yang, 2012).

Being important interested party in agenda building process, corporate communication practitioners now leverage on the interactive Web 2.0 social media to push agenda to the public, circumventing the intermediation role of the traditional media (Agueree, 2016; Cha, Pérez & Haddadi, 2012; Kim & Kiousis, 2012). Bruns (2008) has also documented the agenda building influence of new media on the mainstream media.

Using the analogy of how CNN repeatedly re-echo public dissension about President George W. Bush's nomination of Harriet Miers as Supreme Court Justice by bloggers, this scholar provides and instantiation of how mainstream media accepted bloggers' voice into the public sphere. This development indicates the heuristic value of agenda building theory and process in understanding the packaging of news.

Since news packaging is predominantly sources' dependent, agenda building effort flows naturally into what gatekeepers will contend with in their eventual news selection, processing and dissemination activities. Like agenda building, therefore, gatekeeping theoretical considerations have metamorphosed from organisation-centred, hierarchical and unidirectional activities in the mainstream environment to become a highly democratised, interactive and multidirectional adventure in the interactive media environment.

Beginning from David Manning White's appropriation of Kurt Lewin's food selection process by World War-era American family, gatekeeping emerged as holistic operational rule of journalism, particularly with regards to news selection practices (Safdar, Imran, Mumtaz & Anjum, 2015; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Vos & Finneman, 2016). Seen as journalists' responsibility of helping the audience to cope with myriad of information competing for attention, gatekeeping as a function, process, model or theory helps to determine the way people define their lives and the world around them and, ultimately, the social reality perceived by every person via content in the mass media (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

Over the decades, therefore, scholars have produced a corpus of literature on how journalistic routines and conventions dovetail into predictable organisational behaviour that morphed into standardised content of media organisation (Lindner, 2016; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). In addition to gluing to journalistic ethics and standard (Arant & Anderson, 2001), news professionals also internalise and externalise parameters for defining news theorised as Galtung and Ruge's news values, consisting of frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, unexpectedness, continuity, compositional balance, elite nations, elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative (Nunno, 2016).

This implies that the gatekeeping mechanism is rooted in established value orientation and professional socialisation that help manage the dilemma between existence of infinite events competing for public attention and limited journalistic space to mediate the events. Gatekeeping function has not remained exclusive preserve of media professional however. The limited control over information gathering, processing and dissemination that characterised the traditional, mainstream media era has been challenged by the advent of various Web-propelled mass mediated apparatuses.

Citing the works of other scholars, Vos and Finneman (2016) contend that judgments about what constitutes news have not been static, shifting from idea-centred (issue-based) to event-centred (personality-based) orientation. Today, polemics rage as to whether core media professionals enjoy monopoly of 'gating' the information that would become a common interactional currency in the public domain. One side of the divides contends that there are as numerous gatekeepers today as there are platforms for disseminating information *en masse*.

In a requiem for gatekeeping theory in the age of digital media, Heinderyckx and Vos (2016), for example, offered that the idea of gatekeeping emerged at a period of limited news product and difficulty in information access, which made the audience to be passive recipients of choices made by editors. They thus argue that the mushrooming of news portals and social media was supposed to pummel any attempt at gatekeeping because if legacy media hold back on a story, Twitter, Facebook, or other social media could offer alternative gates capable of flooding the public sphere.

In the same token, Scholars have arrayed evidence in support of how the new media facilitate mediated-information bypass thus allowing the audience to have a glimpse of the social world via direct connection with individuals, institutions and organisations of interest through the instrumentality of new and social media platforms (Bruns, 2008; Heinderyckx & Vos, 2016; Mehrotra, 2017).

Contrary opinions also exist on indivisibility of gatekeeping power between mainstream media professionals and actors in digitally-powered alternative journalistic enterprises. Shoemaker and Vos (2009), for instance, reject the notion that the emergence of the Internet signals disappearance of gates and gatekeepers.

They surmise that information flow back and forth and, in most instances, social media 'gatekeepers' pick up from the content of the mainstream media.

The belief that most news aggregating platforms and blogs rely on information that have previously been gated by the mainstream news media also supported the notion that established media outlets bear significant influence on the content of other media outlets (Ali & Fahmy, 2013; Welbers, 2015; Welbers, van Atteveldt, Kleinnijenhuis & Ruigrok, 2016).

Although the arrival of digital media changes the configuration of societal communication infrastructure and mediated communication system and attenuates traditional gatekeeping power hitherto enjoyed by the mainstream media, gatekeeping function has been considered desirable even in the highly democratised new and social media environment. In line with this assertion, Lindner (2016) has found that editorial staff of digital media acts as online gatekeepers who enforce journalistic norms.

Arant and Anderson (2001) have also discovered that online editors favoured the control of information online through enforcement of journalistic norms routines, standards and ethics that undergird the gatekeeping role of the media. Heinderyckx and Vos (2015) also support the idea of desirability of gatekeeping online. In their view, the availability of abundant information online creates 'noise' that require professional gatekeepers to manage if the audience must benefit from sea of content available on digital media platforms.

Besides the controversy that characterised desirability or otherwise of gatekeeping paradigm in the digital era, the theoretical position seems to be heuristically yielding more repertoires. Amidst the contestation on who keeps the gates have emerged the idea of audience gatekeeper, a notion that mediated-information management is not only the turf of professional journalists. Audience gatekeeping has been strongly associated with emergence of digital media that facilitate interactive engagement among news stakeholders (Heinderyckx & Vos, 2016).

"Audience gatekeeping describes the process of users passing along news items and stories after their own values of newsworthiness [by] continuously emailing news items and sharing them through social media channels" (Böttcher, 2014; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009).

The interactive and users' metrics properties of online news platforms have been considers important variable in the gatekeeping calculus. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) believe that the measurement of online audience metrics provides cheap and necessary insight into audience preference, hitherto impossible in the era of limiting technologies of media content production, distribution and consumption. Böttcher (2014) also contends that audience preferences are todays shared in the newsrooms, putting journalists under pressure to do audience bidding and conform to their demands. The potency of audience gatekeeping power could, however, be confounded by the model of journalism embraced by any news organisation.

According to Welbers (2015), audience gatekeeping influence would be dominant in organisation embracing the Market Model of journalistic practice compared to those utilising the Trustee Model (see also Mustapha, Ahmad & Abubakar, 2014). The significance of audience gatekeeping was bolstered by Vos (2015) who found that the degree of clicks news attracts among the audience predicts more subsequent coverage among journalists who sometimes perceived audience clicks as indicator of perceived newsworthiness.

Other conceptual offshoots of gatekeeping in the digital era are network gatekeeping and gatewatching theroretical considerations. Network gatekeeping attempts to explain collaborative gatekeeping mechanism that diffuse power over media content management (Barzilai-Nahon, 2008, 2009). Barzilai-Nahon (2008) describes networked gatekeeping as multidirectional filtering of information between gatekeepers as opposed to the traditional unidirectional control of information.

Gatewatching, on the other hand, describes collaborative form of content creation, multiplication and dissemination that facilitates availability of information in many channels simultaneously (Bruns, 2008). Mehrotra (2017, p. 10) posits that gatewatching "builds on the commonplace assumption that the Web (and the Net) is an egalitarian, open-access medium which is particularly well suited to liberating the exchange of alternative, non-mainstream content and ideas".

According to him "the idea of gatewatching is inspired by the view that the Net inherently routes around any obstructions to the free flow of information, editorial interventions and access restrictions". Bruns (2008, p. 252) poignantly posits that gatewatching embodies:

> a conversational, active, and productive engagement with existing mainstream media content [drawing] on news reports and official publications but frequently use journalists', politicians', and corporate actors' own words against them by creatively (but, ideally, truthfully) reappropriating repurposing, recombining, recontextualizing, and reinterpreting such content to show a very different conception of reality.

While gatekeeping theory, like agenda building theory, has proved to be a true and well-tested theory within mass communication and media studies scholastic enterprise, it requires continuing exploration of its mechanisms, particularly in the contemporary information-prosumer age, where anybody with even the most miniaturised digital tool can break news and lay claim to information dissemination in a society that has become highly digitalised.

Conclusion

Journalists play important role in the formation of public opinion and can, therefore, be regarded as influential actors in contemporary societies, where information to make important political and economic decisions flows torrentially from many directions.

Granted that the mass media serve as conduits for information flow and rely on third party sources to meet objectivity and fairness criteria and confer credibility on their content, it is important to manage the role well in the interest of social responsibility expectation of the media system to the society.

Operating in concert with numerous agenda builders with inherent personal interests to control the public agenda, media professionals must be pragmatic enough to prevent personal interests towering over public interests. This is more important in an era where mainstream media domination over societal information management is being challenged, shared and conflated by the emerging *Fifth Estate*, the digital media platforms.

Ideally, the media institutions function not only as societal communication system, but also as consensus builders that guarantee coalescing of forces towards realisation of common societal goals. In this regards, media professional should avoid irresponsible agenda builders and warped gatekeeping mechanisms that can fuel polarisation and dissensus among the citizens they ought to serve responsibly. The social, cultural and professional capitals being enjoyed by the media institutions and media professionals are products of the expectations that the mass media will function as watchdog, the public sphere and open marketplace place of idea, where ideas will be tested and contested with a view to building a highly democratised and egalitarian society. Hence, media professionals should live up to the billing by being highly critical of information they sourced and eventually used in setting agenda for the public.

The new media ecology that challenges the established mediated information management paradigms of agenda building and gatekeeping needs to be intensively and extensively studied to facilitate the emergence of common ground in dual roles of sourcing and disseminating news, which are the core theses of the two theoretical traditions. While the new media landscape is helping in extending the frontiers of these theories via opening of new areas of research and emergence of new constructs; most of the studies instantiating this development have been Westerncentric.

There is need for cross-cultural validation of this development in order to establish common ground in theorisation of mass media and communication phenomenon across the world. Additionally, there is increasing need for integration of digital and media literacy curriculum in mass communication and mass media studies pedagogy, particularly in the developing countries, where digital media platforms are still emerging.

Of late, the new media platforms have also bolstered the mainstreaming of two dysfunctional media roles- hate speech and fake news. This development calls for additional responsibilities on the part of mainstream and citizen journalists who provide information that informed perceived reality and public opinion of the mass audience. The way agendas are allowed to be built and the degree of porosity of the journalistic gates would determine what eventually gets to the media space. Hence, embracing the tenets of responsible journalistic practice should be continually promoted among members of various forms of journalistic practices. Only a media system that can altruistically serve the society with the needed information to make informed decisions can be regarded as being a worthy Fourth and Fifth Estates of the real and not Fourth and Fifth Estates of the Wreck. Hence, media professionals should help in building a society in which their institutions and practices would remain relevant through responsible agenda building, gatekeeping and agenda setting processes.

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