

# Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media

## Media Advocacy

Contributors: I-Huei Cheng

Book Title: Encyclopedia of Children, Adolescents, and the Media

Chapter Title: "Media Advocacy"

Pub. Date: 2007

Access Date: March 27, 2014

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: Thousand Oaks

Print ISBN: 9781412905305

Online ISBN: 9781412952606

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952606.n255>

Print pages: 492-494

This PDF has been generated from SAGE knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952606.n255>

Mass media are powerful in presenting issues and shaping opinions in the society, and media advocacy is an approach that attempts to influence media's coverage of an issue and to help a relevant policy achieve public awareness and support. According to Lawrence Wallack, Lori Dorfman, and their colleagues, the purpose of media advocacy is to contribute to the development of social and policy initiatives that promote health and well-being. In general, media advocacy efforts focus on issues related to health and human well-being, and the goal is usually to get more news coverage for a topic and to shape the relevant debates in a desired fashion.

Media advocacy efforts largely emphasize news coverage because news has a crucial impact on people at both the personal and public levels. At the personal level, news media may provide information and elicit changes in individuals' knowledge and attitudes about a topic, and it may even stimulate a person to take actions. At the public level, mass media can raise awareness of certain issues among the public and policymakers and can contribute to improving conditions in the society. For example, a news report on former president Ronald Reagan's colon cancer and publicity following the death of television journalist Katie Couric's husband, who had the same disease, motivated people to get tests to detect the same health problem. A series of newspaper articles on infant mortality led to legislative support for providing low-cost prenatal care.

## How Media Advocacy Works

Several theoretical notions are often mentioned to explain why and how advocacy efforts through news media may work. In particular, agenda setting and framing theory provide good perspectives to understand the important role of news media in the process of advocating an issue or a public policy.

[p. 492 ↓ ]

## Agenda Setting

Agenda setting proposes that media can influence the public agenda regarding what issues are considered important; framing theory suggests that the way media frame or present an issue can influence how people think about it. Specifically, the initial research on agenda setting proposed that the media coverage and placement of an issue could influence the public to consider the issue an important topic. That is, the media agenda sets the public agenda: The issues selected and covered by media become the issues on the top of public's mind. For example, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw analyzed media coverage of the 1968 presidential election. They found that issues receiving the most media coverage were also the issues voters considered important. This study was followed by many others that found much the same thing, leading to a large body of literature on agenda setting. In short, early research on agenda setting described that media determine what issues audiences think about.

More recent research on agenda setting suggested that media could further influence how audiences think about an issue. Scholars suggested that the media could also influence whether people associated positive or negative attributes with a policy or person. For example, Guy Golan and Wayne Wanta found that a political candidate who was covered more favorably in media was more likely to be perceived in a positive light. Such influence is called second-level agenda setting.

## Framing Theory

Relevant to second-level agenda setting, framing theory proposes that there are some consistent patterns in the way that media cover an issue and that these patterns influence how audiences conceive the issue. As Robert Entman argued, the ways in which media frame an issue determine what information people can select from and what will be left out, as well as what issues will be considered salient. Framing theory also suggests that what and how information is presented in media can impact people's recognition of problems, their diagnoses of what causes these problems, and their judgments and selection of solutions. Framing theory holds that because

message framing influences how people's cognitive schema and attribution process are constructed, it can determine how media content is comprehended and incorporated with existing knowledge and can even shape the attitudes and behaviors people adopt. Thus, as advocates attempt to communicate with target audiences, message framing plays an important role in shaping an issue during the agenda setting process.

## Media Advocacy Related to Youth

Some activist groups or organizations use media advocacy strategies to promote children's and adolescents' health and well-being. Some of their efforts have generated positive outcomes and have been documented as successful cases in health promotion through a media advocacy approach. For example, the Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) organization has been successful in obtaining and sustaining media attention as well as public support for policies to reduce drunk driving. In one case reported in a 1991 issue of *Lobbying and Influence Alert*, MADD mobilized to generate media coverage and public responses to a drunk driving law in Hawaii; the law would have deleted a provision allowing for nearly automatic license revocation for drivers who refused to take a Breathalyzer™ test when stopped by the police. MADD staged actions in front of Hawaii's Eternal Flame war memorial on Memorial Day and pointed out the "flaw in the law" to the press and the public. The messages were framed to create the belief that we should remember not only those killed in war but also those killed on the highways and that enactment of the flawed law would enable drunk drivers to avoid punishment. The speech podium for the event carried phone numbers of the governor's and senate president's office, and within a week, thousands of phone calls had been received there. Accompanied with grassroots campaigns to collect signatures on petitions and promote phone calls to legislators, MADD ultimately made sure the provision was deleted. This case offers a good example of how media advocacy can be a successful approach to obtaining media coverage and public awareness and to achieving a goal of promoting an important issue or supporting a public policy.

I-Huei Cheng

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412952606.n255>

See also

- [Advertising Campaigns, Prosocial](#)
- [Agenda Setting](#)
- [Anti-Drug Media Campaigns](#)
- [Media Effects](#)
- [Media Literacy](#) (various entries)
- [Public Health Campaigns](#)
- [Schema Theory](#)
- [Television, Prosocial Content of](#)

#### Further Readings

Brown, J. D., & Walsh-Childers, K. (1994). Effects of media on personal and public health . In J. Bryant, ed. & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (pp. 389–416) . Mahwah NJ: Erlbaum.

Entman, R. M. Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm . *Journal of Communication* vol. 43 no. (4) pp. 51–58 (1993). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>

Golan, G., Wanta, W. Second-level agenda setting in the New Hampshire primary: A comparison of coverage in three newspapers and public perceptions of candidates . *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* vol. 78 no. (2) pp. 247–259 (2001). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/107769900107800203>

Hallahan, K. Seven models of framing: Implications for public relations . *Journal of Public Relations Research* vol. 11 no. (3) pp. 205–242 (1999). [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1103\\_02](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr1103_02)

MADD gets mad . *Lobbying and Influence Alert* vol. 1 no. (3) pp. 1–2 (1991).

McCombs, M., Shaw, D. L. The agenda setting function of mass media . *Public Opinion Quarterly* vol. 26 pp. 176–187 (1972). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/267990>

Stillman, F. A., Cronin, K. A., Evans, W. D., Ulasevich, A. Can media advocacy influence newspaper coverage of tobacco: Measuring the effectiveness of the American

stop smoking intervention study's (ASSIST) media advocacy strategies . Tobacco Control vol. 10 pp. 137–144. (2001). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/tc.10.2.137>

Treno, A. J., Breed, L., Holder, H. D., Roeper, P., Thomas, B. A., Gruenewald, P. J. Evaluation of media advocacy efforts within a community trial to reduce alcohol-involved injury: Preliminary news results . Evaluation Research vol. 20 no. (4) pp. 404–423 (1996). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0193841X9602000403>

Wallack, L., & Dorfman, L. (2001). Putting policy into health communication: The role of media advocacy . In R. E. Rice, ed. & C. K. Atkin (Eds.), Public communication campaigns (3rd ed., pp. 389–401) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Wallack, L., Dorfman, L., Jernigan, D., & Themba, M. (1993). Media advocacy and public health: Power for prevention . Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Walsh-Childers, K. Newspaper influence on health policy development . Newspaper Research Journal vol. 15 no. (8) pp. 89–104 (1994).