Agenda Setting, Religion and New Media: The Chabad Case Study

Tsurriel Rashi, Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Maxwell McCombs, University of Texas, Austin, USA

**Contact: tsuriel.rashi@gmail.com and
maxwell.mccombs@sbcglobal.net**

Keywords: Agenda Setting, Religion, Media, Internet, Jewish, Chabad

Abstract

Theoretically grounded in agenda setting, a theory focused on the transfer of influence from communication media to a public, this paper examines the media activity of Chabad, an Ultra-Orthodox Jewish movement that is committed both to making Judaism generally accessible and to influencing public discourse. Rabbi M. M. Schneerson, the movement's late wise and charismatic leader, undertook this dual mission in light of his conception of the theological grounds for the exploitation of mass media. Our examination of Chabad's agenda-setting communication strategy was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the range of communication media used by Chabad in an effort to achieve its goal?
2. What evidence is there regarding the agenda-setting success of these communication efforts?

Although it is obviously difficult to judge the precise degree of success, it is clear that Chabad is involved in a wide range of media and public activity and has already influenced public discourse well beyond the range of the movement itself and of the Jewish religion. The answer to the two questions above will help us understand the various movements that try to influence the agenda on religious grounds, so that we can determine the interface between religion and setting the agenda. It may also assist the efforts of other religious groups that want to influence the media and the political agenda.

About the Authors

Tsuriel Rashi is Chair in the Department of Mass Communication at Herzog College of Education in Jerusalem, and a lecturer in the School of Communication at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat-Gan, Israel. Maxwell McCombs is Professor Emeritus in the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin.

To cite this article: Rashi, T. and McCombs, M., 2015. "Agenda Setting, Religion and New Media: The Chabad Case Study." *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 4(1), pp. 126-145. Online. Available at: <<http://www.jrmdc.com/journal/issue/view/8>>.

1. Introduction

Religious groups and organizations devote considerable resources to communication and education designed to teach their beliefs and principles to their adherents and to maintain the salience of those beliefs and principles in the daily lives of their followers and even in the lives of a more general population. The focus here is on

those communications that seek to maintain that salience, communications that range from sermons during regular religious services to extensive use of mass and social media to reach both adherents and a larger audience.

A useful intellectual tool for describing and analyzing these communication efforts, especially efforts grounded in mass communication, is agenda-setting theory, which examines the relationship between the specific content of the messages distributed by the mass media or other channels of communication and the perceptions of the public (McCombs, 2014). Agenda-setting theory asserts the existence of a major link between the prominence given to topics in a communicator's messages and their perceived importance in the public eye. Topics emphasized in the mass media or other channels are viewed as being more important than those not covered. The extent of the coverage itself serves to render a particular topic more important than one that has not been the subject of major media attention. In other words, the messages of the mass media or other communicators influence the prominence of these topics among the public through repetition and redundancy. These agenda-setting effects have been found in hundreds of empirical studies of numerous subjects around the world (Zhou, Kim & Kim, 2015; Johnson, 2014). Early theories regarding the influence of mass communication focused on persuasion and attitude change (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953; Klapper, 1960). Agenda-setting theory examines an earlier outcome in the hierarchy of media effects in order to determine those topics that are considered the most important and worthy of attention (McGuire, 1989).

Our specific focus herein is on the communication strategy of the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish movement known as Chabad, which has committed itself to making Judaism accessible to adherents in every corner of the world and to influencing public discourse. Chabad's emphasis on mass communication channels is particularly striking because, as we discuss in detail below, the use of communication technology for any purpose has been the subject of an enormous amount of debate and controversy in the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities.

2. Research Questions and Methodology

Our examination of Chabad's agenda-setting communication strategy was guided by two research questions:

1. What is the range of communication media used by Chabad in an effort to achieve its goal?
2. What evidence is there of the agenda-setting success of these communication efforts?

In terms of methodology, analyses of these varied media domains and their agenda-setting effects can be grounded in either quantitative or qualitative research techniques. In the present study the methodology employed is qualitative and descriptive. Although the vast majority of this wide-array research is based on quantitative methods, there is nothing inherent in the theory that limits it to quantitative approaches. It is simply that the seminal study by McCombs and Shaw (1972), which is a quantitative study, is a strong methodological, as well as theoretical, precedent. Regardless of the choice of methodology, the goals are the same for qualitative and quantitative studies, namely, describing the agenda of the communicator and/or the agenda of the intended audience, and when a pair of agendas is described, determining the degree of correspondence and influence between them.

To answer the two research questions raised above, we examined Chabad websites, communication channels, and publications. The answers obtained in this manner were further honed by extensive interviews by the first author at the annual Chabad international convention in New York City in November 2012. Three dozen Chabad representatives from all over the world participated in structured interviews based on a multiple-choice questionnaire, which allows for relatively precise coding and comparison of responses.

As is usual in qualitative research, this representative sample was relatively small and was not presumed to represent all of the followers of Chabad. According to Stake, the real practice of case study research is unique and inclusive. We take a particular case and learn to know it well, not how it is different from other cases, but what are its characteristics and significance (Stake, 1995: 8). The interviews were analyzed using Grounded Theory. In this approach analyses of the findings are not predetermined by the

researcher, but, rather, the research is interpreted during the data analysis process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994).

The research began by using a multi-choice questionnaire that was a basis for a structured interview. In a structured interview, the researcher is faithful to the formulation and the attendant questions. The interviewer does not change the order of the questions regardless of the responses received during the course of the interview. This kind of formal interview was an essential element in ensuring a uniform approach to all of the interviewees. On the one hand, the questionnaire that guides a structured interview offers such important advantages as uniformity, objectivity of the research, and subsequent traceability. On the other hand, there are some disadvantages, such as the lack of independence during the interview.

Among the three dozen individuals who sat for the structured interview, which was conducted using a multiple-choice questionnaire, three subjects participated in open interviews. In the open interview, the researcher did not come with prepared questions, but began with a general query and then went along with the unfolding interaction. In this format the interviewee's responses determined how the interview would proceed, the researcher determining the order of the questions as suggested by the flow. The researcher focused on several points to help the subjects reveal their stories and elicit their meanings.

The significant advantage of the open interviews was that the researcher was able to understand more about the interviewee and his worldview. The disadvantages were the dynamism and complexity of the conversations. Owing to this complexity it is more difficult to compare the responses of the various interviewees and analyze their statements. These open interviews did allow for much deeper probing into the issues that were being dealt with, but did not lend themselves to accurate coding. Moreover, the variations in the responses may be affected by differences in the formulation of the questions, and not just the differences among the interviewees.

The three principal interviewees were: Rabbi Motti Seligson, director of media relations at Chabad Lubavitch at the headquarters in Brooklyn, NY, and the director of public and media relations for Chabad.org; Rabbi Daniel Gordon, resource development director for the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS; and Rabbi Levi Kanelsky,

director of the European Alef Institute and the representative of Chabad to EU institutions.

The semi-structured, in-depth interviews were based on a coherent plan, but one that allowed for maximum flexibility in the order of the questions asked and expansion on the subjects discussed, depending on the personal interaction that developed between the interviewer and the interviewee.

3. Agenda-Setting Theory

Every social system must have an agenda if it is to prioritize its concerns and make decisions as to where to invest its resources (Dearing & Rogers, 1992, 1). An agenda, first of all, consists of a set of topics communicated in a hierarchy at a given point in time. The agenda, whether a media agenda or a public agenda, is a hierarchy because the included topics do not all bear the same weight. Some receive considerable attention, others much less. An agenda presented by mass communication media can be compared with the agenda of these same topics created by members of the public, and considerable research has documented that the media agenda has a substantive impact on the public agenda (McCombs, 2014; Zhou, Kim & Kim, 2015). In other words, the media frequently have strong agenda-setting effects on the public.

This connection between the media and the public was emphasized by Walter Lippmann (1922) in his seminal book on public opinion, in which the opening chapter was titled “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads.” However, it was McCombs and Shaw (1972) who first used the term “agenda setting” in their analysis of the public issue agenda of the news media and the issue agenda of Chapel Hill, NC, voters during the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign. The media’s agenda-setting effects on the public revealed in this instance gave rise to hundreds of subsequent studies (Dearing & Rogers, 1992; Zhou, Kim & Kim, 2015).

Although most agenda-setting research from Chapel Hill to the present day has investigated public issues, political candidates, and other aspects of public affairs, agenda-setting theory is applicable to a much wider range of subjects, ranging from organizations and institutions (Carroll, 2011; Bantimaroudis, Zyglidopoulos & Symeou, 2010), to sports teams (Fortunato, 2001), to religious practice (Hellinger & Rashi, 2009;

Buddenbaum, 2001), and to many other areas of interest to scholars. In this study, moving beyond the dominant focus of agenda-setting research on public affairs, the object of interest was Judaism.

With the vast expansion of the communication landscape in recent decades – first cable television and subsequently satellite television among the mass media and more recently the proliferation of personalized social media – some observers have predicted the diminution, if not the disappearance, of agenda-setting effects on the scale observed over the past half-century (Chaffee and Metzger, 2001). Despite the popularity of speculation on this possibility, the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence to date suggests that the agenda-setting role of the communication media endures in the new media landscape (Meraz, 2011a; Sayre et al., 2010; McCombs, 2014). The new social media have joined the chorus of media voices and demonstrate agenda-setting effects among the public similar to those found over the decades for newspapers and television (Tran 2014, Vargo et al., 2014). In the journalism arena, the new media have a symbiotic relationship with legacy media, primarily complementing the basic reporting of newspapers and television (Meraz, 2011b). As we shall see in detail, Chabad employs both legacy media and especially the new media with their ability to reach niche audiences as channels of communication for carrying out its religious mission (Golan, 2013).

4. Chabad and Its Agenda-Setting Ambitions

Chabad-Lubavitch Hassidism, one of the largest Hassidic movements in the world, has a membership estimated at more than 200,000 (Wertheimer, 1993, p. xiv–xv), with the largest concentrations in New York and Israel. There are today some 4,000 Chabad Houses operating in approximately 950 cities in 75 countries.¹ The sect is also known as the “Lubavitch,” after the Russian village that was the center of the movement’s activity and the place where most of the Chabad religious leaders (*Admorim*) lived and functioned for about 100 years. For more than 40 years in the twentieth century, under the leadership

¹For more details about the movement see:

<http://www.chabadworld.net/page.asp?pageID=A98493DD-6B2B-4414-A940-1ABED9F0F36B>

of the last Lubavitch *Admor*, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Chabad involved itself in all aspects of Jewish society while also attempting to bring the wider Jewish public closer to Jewish tradition.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), known as the Lubavitch Rebbe, or more succinctly, the Rebbe, was the seventh and last of the dynasty of the leaders of Chabad, and led the movement from 1951 until his death in 1994.² He called upon his followers to try to influence all Jews, including the secular, wherever they might be, to keep the Jewish *mitzvot* and study the Torah by going to places where they would encounter the public. The Rebbe initiated activities that he called ‘campaigns,’ some of which were seasonal and related to the Jewish festivals. Chabad initiated lighting Hanukkah candles in shops and city centers, street parades prior to the festivals, and the distribution of religious items at stalls on busy thoroughfares.

The Rebbe also initiated “the *mitzvah* campaign,” a call to all Jews to observe ten precepts, which he viewed as the heart of Judaism, and to influence other Jews to observe them as well: loving your fellow Jew, Jewish education, Torah study, donning phylacteries, affixing kosher mezuzot,³ giving charity, filling the home with books of Jewish learning, candle-lighting on Friday nights and on the eves of festivals, eating kosher food, and family purity.

² For details about the unique personality of the last Chabad Rebbe and an analysis of his worldview and the extent of his influence on the Jewish world, see: Jacobson, 2002; Ehrlich, 2000; Heilman & Friedman, 2010.

³ A *mezuzah* or “doorpost” in plural: *mezuzot* is a piece of parchment (often contained in a decorative case) inscribed with specified Hebrew verses from the Torah (Deut. 6:4–9 and 11:13–21). These verses comprise the Jewish prayer *Shema Yisrael*, beginning with the phrase: “Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is One.” A *mezuzah* is affixed to the doorframe in Jewish homes to fulfill the *mitzvah* (biblical commandment) to inscribe the words of “on the doorposts of your house” (Deut. 6:9). Some interpret Jewish law to require a *mezuzah* on every doorway in the home apart from bathrooms and closets too small to qualify as rooms. The parchment is prepared by a qualified scribe who has undergone many years of meticulous training, and the verses are written in black indelible ink with a special quill pen. The parchment is then rolled up and placed inside the case.

The Chabad movement, like many other ideological movements that want to influence the public sphere, began with print media and continues to publish newspapers and pamphlets (Rashi, 2011). Whereas other religious movements in Israel suffered from financial constraints and are still struggling with the difficulty of publishing a newspaper for a unique and small population and look for political support, the print media is no longer Chabad's primary focus for ideological as well as religious reasons. Rabbi Schneerson was the first Ultra-Orthodox leader to take advantage of broadcast media to promote his religious ideas.⁴ He recognized the media's tremendous inherent power and refused to shy away from using it to advance his religious views simply because it was generally associated with concepts alien to a Jewish religious lifestyle. Although he completely forbade reading secular newspapers and viewing secular television, he did issue a call to his followers to exploit media technology in order to popularize Jewish thought, particularly Hassidic/kabbalistic ideas.⁵ He found a number of theological justifications for employing intense media activity as a tool for raising Jewish awareness among Jews and encouraging the observance of the seven Noahide laws⁶ among gentiles. In other words, Rabbi Schneerson advocated the use of mass media to advance an agenda-setting role.

⁴ The Lubavitch Rebbe's attitude toward the media is exceptional in the field of Orthodox thought. In order to understand the uniqueness of his position in relation to other prevailing attitudes, see: Rashi, 2011.

⁵ To understand his opinion in the matter as part of his general worldview, see: Kraus, 2001, p. 139–149. For further review, see: Ginzburg & Baranover, 2000, p. 171–194.

⁶ The seven laws of Noah or the Noahide laws are a set of moral imperatives that, according to the Talmud, were given by God as a binding set of rules for the “children of Noah.” that is, all of humanity (Genesis 9:4–6). Accordingly, any non-Jew who adheres to these laws is regarded as a righteous gentile and is assured of a place in the world to come, the final reward of the righteous. The seven Noahide laws as traditionally enumerated are: (1) Do not deny God. (2) Do not blaspheme God. (3) Do not murder. (4) Do not engage in incestuous, adulterous, or homosexual relationships. (5) Do not steal. (6) Do not eat of a live animal. (7) Establish courts. (“The Seven Noahide Laws: Jewish Virtual Library”. Jewishvirtuallibrary.org. Retrieved 8 November 2014):

In order to analyze Chabad's agenda-setting ambitions it is necessary to understand the role of messianism in the movement over the last 60 years. Rabbi Schneerson believed that his generation was to be the last before the messianic redemption and that the way to bring on the redemption was to rejuvenate Jewry worldwide – given a causal link between observance of religious obligations and the coming of the Messiah. The mass media were harnessed for this objective (Cohen, 2012:177).

His justification for using traditional media such as radio and television as well new media was also based on the principle from the Babylonian Talmud that “all objects of this world were created to be exploited for holy use – to spread the word of Torah” (*Yoma* 38a) In response to the argument that these tools are primarily used for the dissemination of heresy and for other “impure” designs, he noted that everything in Creation exists for positive causes. It is man that is given the choice whether to use them for positive or negative purposes. He further asked why mass media should be available to all fields of endeavor, except to Torah.

In later years, Rabbi Schneerson used satellite technology to broadcast various events from his headquarters in Brooklyn. In 1991, he arranged for an international live broadcast as he lit the Hanukkah lights. In a lecture following the candle lighting, he spoke of mass media and its impact and claimed that access to mass media invokes a religious obligation to spread the story of the Hanukkah miracle. He further spoke of the religious concept that “all that God created in this world, He created for His honor.” With this in mind, he said, it becomes necessary to view the technological advancements of the modern era as additional ways to “increase the honor of God” by utilizing these advancements for holy purposes.

5. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Communities and the Internet

Among Ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities, attitudes toward the Internet range from hesitant acceptance to principled rejection. The outlook that sides with acceptance sees it as a tool for finding employment, information, and services, as well as a facilitator of horizontal and vertical communication between Ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel and abroad, and even between the members of the community and the great sages of past

generations by means of group learning, rabbinical events on line, and on-line Torah classes (Zarfati and Blais, 2002; Cohen, 2012; Golan, 2013; Pearl, 2014).

In contrast, the outlook that totally rejects the Internet perceives it as a dangerous medium that may expose the community to deleterious content, even unintentionally. From this viewpoint, the Internet, which includes infinite worlds of content and enables anonymous communication, can quite easily expose the Ultra-Orthodox world to works of heresy, sexual or violent material, and other content that desecrates the name of God and threatens traditional values (Livio & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2007; Rosenberg and Rashi, 2015).

The dominance of this negative outlook led to the establishment of a special rabbinical committee regarding “the issue of ‘breaches’⁷ in computers,” which on January 7, 2000, issued a “Torah opinion” stating that “every man of Israel should know that the connection to Internet or to television places, God forbid, the continuation of the generations of Israel in grave danger, and is a terrible breach in the holiness of Israel.” The Internet’s danger is “a thousand times more serious [than television], and is liable to bring destruction, God forbid, to the nation of Israel” (Zarfati and Blais 2002, p. 50). Consequently, Internet usage was forbidden, even for the purpose of assistance in providing a livelihood (Cohen, 2012: 137–139).

However, much of the Ultra-Orthodox public found the prohibition unacceptable. Several groups in the community ignored the “Torah opinion” and continued to use the Internet, including some of the Hassidic sects – Breslav, Chabad, Rachlin, and others (Zarfati and Blais, 2002).

Chabad-Lubavitch Hassidism is especially prominent among groups in the Ultra-Orthodox community using the Internet, and its agenda-setting strategy was the focus of this case study (Cohen, 2012; Golan, 2013; Pearl, 2014). Chabad’s employment of the Internet when it came into common use and became easily accessible made the organization one of the most active Jewish movements involved in Judaism outreach

⁷ Breach, *pirtza*, is the common term in Ultra-Orthodox rabbinic speech for breach in traditional values, rabbinic decrees, or exposure to improper content.

work. Chabad has a number of internal news sites (Golan, 2013) as well as various content sites that enable one to download Jewish information.

Unlike other Ultra-Orthodox educational institutions, Chabad also has Internet sites. For online learning it has articles by the Rebbe and talks in his own voice. It is possible to choose any talk from among all those that the Rebbe delivered during the forty-one years he held office from 1951 to 1992, catalogued by year, month, day, event, or issue. Other sites include an on-line Torah library, on which there are entire books dating from the last 300 years.

Over the years local *poskim* (halakhic adjudicators) have been asked questions regarding the halakha. The custom was that the person with the query would send a question to the rabbi, and the rabbi would respond. Every so often a pamphlet of questions and answers would be printed, which was known as “*shu”t*” (an acronym for *she’elot uteshuvot*). The extant *shu”t* literature starts from the tenth century and to date includes more than 3000 *shu”t* treatises. Technological developments have given the *shu”t* a new lease on life, and the Chabad movement has initiated many ways to ask Chabad rabbis questions on the Internet. On the website of Chabad youth in Israel, <http://chabad.org.il/Questions/Index.asp?CategoryID=68>, there is a column dealing with questions and answers that includes more than 1,000 questions and answers on halakha and customs, with a distinct orientation toward the Chabad viewpoint. The www.askmoses.com site in America, a “hot line” for people with questions about or related to Judaism, offers live chats and a database of questions that have been asked. Questions on many issues are answered by employees of Chabad of California: holidays, philosophy, Jewish identity, Chassidism, daily life, life cycle, and intimacy among others. Some 30% of the visitors to the site are not Jewish.⁸ Assistance is available in English, Hebrew, Russian, Spanish, and French. Chabad also has a channel on U-Tube: www.youtube.com/askmoses.

The Chabad movement includes thousands of houses located all over the world, set up and run by what are known as emissaries. These houses have many websites, the most important of them being the multi-language site <http://chabad.org> run by *Mercoz*

⁸ Duin, Julia (February 8, 2009), “Ask Moses Fields Judaism Queries,” *The Washington Times*

leInyenei Chinuch (the Center for Educational Matters), which is responsible for emissary activities.⁹ At the present time, Chabad houses around the world have Internet sites, some of which have links to social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Some of the emissaries also have regular radio programs on local and national networks.

6. When Chabad Sets the Agenda

As we mentioned above, Chabad employs both legacy media and especially the new media with their ability to reach niche audiences as channels of communication for carrying out its religious mission (Golan, 2013). More than 76% of the interviewees saw the success of Chabad in California as a model for other branches of the movement. The website of Chabad in California, under the guidance of Rabbi Shlomo Konin, runs the Chabad telethon, “To Life,” featuring celebrities from the entertainment world in an evening of fundraising for the movement’s activities in California. The address of the site, which is in English, is <http://chabad.com>. The address for the telethon event is <http://www.tolife.com/>.

The Chabad telethon was created in 1980 in response to a devastating fire that destroyed the movement’s West Coast headquarters and claimed the lives of three young men. Overwhelming viewer support evidenced by fundraising success encouraged Chabad to continue the telethon, which has evolved into an annual fundraiser allowing the group to greatly expand its community services.

Over the last 34 years, the telethon has helped Chabad forge partnerships with actors, musicians, athletes, civic leaders, and corporate executives. Past participants include Bob Dylan, Martin Sheen, Whoopi Goldberg, Adam Sandler, Dennis Franz, Anthony Hopkins, Howie Mandel, Jimmy Kimmel, Matisyahu, Edward James Olmos, Magic Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bernie Mac, and Mike Piazza. Casts of many television shows, including *Friends* and *Everyone Loves Raymond*, have also made appearances.

As we noted earlier, considerable research has documented that the media agenda has a substantive impact on the public agenda (McCombs, 2014; Zhou, Kim & Kim,

⁹ For data concerning the site, see: <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/chabad.org>

2015). In other words, the media frequently have a strong impact on public agenda-setting. This may be the explanation for the success of Chabad in California, which, in 2014, celebrated 50 years of Jewish-based activity and raised tens of millions of dollars in support of the largest network of educational and non-sectarian social services under Jewish auspices on the West Coast. Monies generated by the telethon fund a range of Chabad's efforts, which include education, summer camps, youth programs, assistance for children with special needs, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, community outreach, crisis intervention, among many others.

Chabad Rabbi Shalom Cunin, one of the organizers of the telethon, has noted that the event is also about promoting all the work that Chabad does for the community, and he quoted his uncle (who established the telethon) as saying that "it's not just about raising money for Chabad – which is important – but it's about raising awareness about Chabad and its programs, and, mainly, bringing out Jewish pride. You turn your TV on, you see dancing rabbis, you see Jewish pride – not just in a synagogue but in everyone's living room" (Torok, 2014). In the open interviews, Rabbi Gordon as well as Rabbi Kanelsky called the California branch a life's work and said that its operations impact the public as well the media agenda, arguing that one religiously motivated person managing set an annual agenda in the public sphere to raise awareness as well as money for his community welfare activities is truly remarkable.

7. From the Media and Public Agendas to the Political Agenda

Rabbi Cunin is only one out of thousands of emissaries who followed the Rebbe in attempting to set an agenda for religious reasons. In recognition of the Rebbe's impact on general education in the United States, which is an outcome of the media and public exposure, the US Congress declared that his birthday would be designated "Education Day," a focus for efforts and resources to improve the face of education in all educational institutions for all ages across the United States. Since 1978, this day has been noted by every president from Carter to Obama.¹⁰

¹⁰ On this issue, see, for example, the most recent declaration by President Obama in 2013:

Further recognition of the extent of the Rebbe's and his followers' influence on the American public agenda came three months after the Rebbe's death, on June 12, 1994, when Congress posthumously awarded him the Congressional Gold Medal, one of the two highest decorations conferred on citizens of the United States. In November 1994, President Bill Clinton awarded the medal in a special ceremony in the Oval Office.¹¹

The three interviewees in the open interview mentioned the congressional decision as proof that the Rebbe's ideas were sound, that he was successful, and that his presence in the public sphere and the coverage of his activities and those of his followers reached the federal level. Although those activities were motivated out of a desire to bring Jews closer to religious observance, the Rebbe was also determined to provide aid for weak population groups in consonance with his religious worldview, and it was his contribution in that sphere that led to congressional recognition.

During the interview Rabbi Seligson, who has hosted many journalists, shared the thought that some 20 years after his death, the Rebbe's figure still serves as a beacon and a role model for his followers. The Chabad Hassidim learned from him how important it is to continue the struggle to influence the public and media agendas, all for religious reasons – to improve the world to bring about the coming of the Messiah.

8. Conclusion

This case study of agenda-setting theory and the presentation of religious considerations examined the link between the Chabad movement and the ambition of its members to use public communication channels to influence the public discourse. This connection is not unique to Chabad and exists in other religious movements that are attempting to influence the national and global agendas. Comparative studies might examine what is happening in the Christian Evangelist movement or in radical Islamic

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/03/21/presidential-proclamation-education-and-sharing-day-usa-2013>

¹¹ <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d103:HR04497;|TOM:/bss/d103query.html>

streams, which are also determined to influence the media and public agendas. This research will help to predict what society will look like in future decades, which undoubtedly will be greatly influenced by the expanding communication media landscape.

Acknowledgements: The authors wish to thank the reviewers and the editor for their efforts in improving this article.

Bibliography

- Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Yoma*. 1995. New York: The Artscroll Series/The Schottenstein Edition, Mesorah Publications.
- Bantimaroudis, P., Zyglidopoulos, S. & Symeou, P., 2010. 'Greek Museum Media Visibility and Museum Visitation: An Exploration of Cultural Agenda Setting.' *Journal of Communication*, 60, pp. 743–57.
- Buddenbaum, J., 2001. 'The Media, Religion, and Public Opinion: Toward a Unified Theory of Cultural Influence.' In: Stout, D. and Buddenbaum, J., eds. *Religion and Popular Culture: Studies in the Interaction of Worldviews*. Ames: Iowa State University Press. Pp. 19-38.
- Barzilai-Nahon, K. & Barzilai, G., 2005. 'Cultured Technology: Internet and Religious Fundamentalism.' *The Information Society*, 21(1), pp. 25-40.
- Campbell, H., 2010. *When Religion Meets New Media*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Chaffee, S. and M. Metzger., 2001. 'The End of Mass Communication?' *Mass Communication and Society*, 4, 365-79.
- Cohen, Y., 2012. *God, Jews and the Media: Religion and Israel's Media*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Craig, C., ed. 2011. *Corporate Reputation and the News Media: Agenda-setting within News Coverage in Developed, Emerging, and Frontier Markets*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Dearing, J.W. & Rogers, E.M., 1992. *Communication Concepts 6: Agenda-Setting*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Ehrlich, A.M., 2000. *Leadership in the Habad Movement: A Critical Evaluation of Habad Leadership, History, and Succession*. New Jersey: Jason Aronson.
- Fishkoff, S., 2003. *The Rebbe's Army: Inside the World of Chabad-Lubavitch*. New York: Shoken.
- Fortunato, J., 2001. *The Ultimate Assist: The Relationship and Broadcasting Strategies of the NBA and Television Networks*. Cresskill: Hampton Press.
- Friedman, M., 1994. 'Habad as Messianic Fundamentalism.' In: Marty, M.E. and Appleby, R.S., eds., *Accounting for Fundamentalisms: The Dynamic Character of Movements*. Vol.4. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 328-373.
- Ginzburg, J. & Baranover, J., 2000. *Ma Rabu Maasecha Hashem [How Manifold Are Thy works, O LORD]*. Jerusalem: Shamir. [In Hebrew]
- Golan, O., 2013. 'Charting Frontiers of Online Religious Communities: The Case of Chabad Jews.' In: Campbell, H., ed. *Digital Religion*. Abingdon: Routledge. Pp. 155-163.
- Heilman, S.C., & Friedman, M.M., 2010. *The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hellinger, M. & Rashi, T. 2009. 'The Jewish Custom of Delaying Communal prayer: A View from Communication Theory.' *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 12, pp. 189-203.
- Horowitz, N., 2001. 'The Haredim and the Internet.' *Kivunim Chadashim*, 3, pp. 7-30. (In Hebrew).

- Hovland, C., Janis, I. & Kelly, H., 1953. *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jacobson, S., 2002. *Toward A Meaningful Life: The Wisdom of the Rebbe*. New York: William Morrow.
- Johnson, T., 2014. *Agenda Setting in a 2.0 World: New Agendas in Communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Klapper, J., 1960. *The Effects of Mass Communication*. New York: Free Press.
- Kraus, Y., 2001. "Living with the Times": *Philosophy and Leadership – Theory and Practice in the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson's Teachings*. Doctoral Thesis, Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University. [In Hebrew]
- Kravel-Tovi, M. and Bilu, Y., 2008. 'The Work of the Present: Constructing Messianic Temporality in the Wake of Failed Prophecy among Chabad Hasidim.' *American Ethnologist* 35, pp. 64–80.
- Lippman, W., 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Livio, O., & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K., 2007. 'Discursive Legitimizing of a Controversial Technology: Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women in Israel and the Internet.' *The Communication Review*, 10(1), pp. 29–56.
- McCombs, M., 2014. *Setting the Agenda*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- McCombs, M. and Shaw, D., 1972. 'The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media.' *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, pp. 176-187.
- McGuire, W., 1989. 'Theoretical Foundations of Campaigns.' In Rice, R. and Atkin, C., eds. *Public Communication Campaigns*, 2nd edn. Newbury Park: SAGE.
- Meraz, S., 2011a. 'The Fight for "How to Think": Traditional Media, Social Networks, and Issue Interpretation.' *Journalism*, 12, pp. 107-127.

- Meraz, S., 2011b. 'Using Time Series Analysis to Measure Intermedia Agenda Setting Influence in Traditional Media and Political Blog Networks.' *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88, pp. 176-194.
- Pearl, S. 2014. 'Exceptions to the Rule: Chabad-Lubavitch and the Digital Sphere.' *Journal of Media and Religion*, 13(3), pp. 123-137.
- Rashi, T., 2011. 'Divergent Attitudes within Orthodox Jewry toward Mass Communication.' *The Review of Communication*, 11(1), pp. 20-38.
- Rosenberg, H. & Rashi, T., 2015. 'Pashkevillim in Campaigns Against New Media: What Can Pashkevillim Accomplish that Newspapers Cannot?' In: Campbell, H., ed., *Digital Judaism*. London: Routledge. Pp.161-182.
- Shandler, J., 2009. *Jews, God and Videotape: Religion and Media in America*. New York: NYU Press.
- Sayre, B., Bode, L., Shah, D., Wilcox, D., & Shah, C., 2010. 'Agenda Setting in a Digital Age: Tracking Attention to California Proposition 8 in Social Media, Online News and Conventional News.' *Policy & Internet*, 2(2), pp. 7-32.
- Stake, R. E., 1995. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J., 1990. *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J., 1994. 'Grounded Theory Methodology.' In: Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S., eds., *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE. Pp. 273-285.
- Torok, R. 2014. 'Tonight: 34th Telethon Celebrates 50 Years.' *Los Angeles Jewish Journal*. Online. Available at: <<http://chabadinfo.com/news/tonight-34th-telethon-celebrates-50-years/>> Accessed 22 February 2015.
- Tran, H., 2014. 'Online Agenda Setting: A New Frontier for Theory Development.' In: Johnson, T., ed. *Agenda Setting in a 2.0 World*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Vargo, C.J., Guo, L., McCombs, M. & Shaw, D., 2014. 'Network Issue Agendas on Twitter During the 2012 U.S. Presidential Election.' *Journal of Communication*, 64, pp. 296-316.
- Wertheimer, J., 1993. *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America*. New York: Basic Books.
- Zarfati, O., & Blais, D., 2002. 'Between "Cultural Enclave" and "Virtual Enclave"-Haredi Society and the Digital Media.' *Kesher*, 32, pp. 47-55. [In Hebrew].
- Zhou, S., Kim, Y. & Kim, Y., 2015. 'Theoretical and Methodological Trends of Agenda Setting Theory: A Thematic Meta-analysis of the Last Five Decades.' Conference paper delivered at the Annual Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, San Francisco.