Agenda-Setting Theory in Political Discourse on Twitter

A case study on traditional media influence
within a popular Citizen Journalism medium

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"The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" - Bernard C. Cohen (1963, p. 13)

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Abstract

The Agenda-Setting Theory was developed in 1972 and focuses on mass media effects on the public. The theory states that the media have a great influence on what is on the public's agenda, what they talk about and what they find important. The theory has been investigated extensively and is still relevant after 40 years. Recent studies have focused on the Agenda-Setting theory in light of Citizen Journalism. In Citizen Journalism, ordinary people create news stories on weblogs or personal websites about events they witness or issues that are on their minds. A recent study showed that such a news story, or even a comment on a forum, can become so popular, that the traditional media eventually reports on the issue. This is called the Reversed Agenda-Setting effect (Kim & Lee, 2007). Since this study, a new social medium called Twitter has become popular very rapidly, and has grown to be one of the public's most important news sources. Additionally, because Twitter is a fast moving and free micro blogging service, this medium is very suitable for Citizen Journalism.

The objective of this thesis was to find out what implications Twitter discourse has on the traditional (1972) and reversed agenda-setting theory (2007). The agenda-setting theory has not yet been investigated with regards to Twitter discourse, which means that this study takes a first glance into the implications this social medium might have on the theory. This research consists of four case studies about subjects that stood out in a political database. The database consists of Dutch Twitter messages that were collected between March 21st and May 6th. The subjects this study focuses on are the Social Agreement, President Putin's visit to the Netherlands, the Throne Exchange of Queen Beatrix and King Willem-Alexander and the King's Song. Within the datasets of these four subjects, the most popular and influential messages were selected using quantitative research methods. Then, a qualitative analysis was done on these messages to see 1) what the origin of the message was, 2) what the content of the message was and 3) what consequences the message had in later news or politics.

The findings of this study showed that traditional media determined a large part of the discourse on Twitter for subjects like the Social Agreement, Putin and the Throne Exchange. However, not all popular messages and topics were initiated by traditional media. Although there was no conclusive evidence for the reversed agenda-setting theory, citizen journalism did play an important role. For the King's Song clear traces of reversed agenda-setting effects were visible in the dataset. Citizens determined the discourse on Twitter, and their comments appeared to have a large effect on traditional media, and even politics.

This study provides new insights into the latest developments surrounding the agenda-setting theory, and attempts to broaden the theory's scope by investigating the theory with regards to Twitter activity. Clear traces were found for both traditional and reversed agenda-setting theory, but further research needs to be conducted to see whether the conclusions of this study can be generalized to all topics or social media platforms.

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1. Introduction

Mass media have a long history in which important innovations and inventions played a big part. One of the earliest inventions came from Johannes Gutenburg in 1440, when he invented the first printing press that made book printing substantially faster. In 1605, the first newspaper in the world was published; "*Relation aller Fürnemmen und gedenckwürdigen Historien*" in Strasburg, Germany (Weber, 2006). In 1910, the first ever radio broadcast was a live performance of several opera singers at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City. It is considered to be the birth of public radio broadcasting (Whitely, S. 2002), after which radio became a popular media for music, entertainment and news broadcast. Not long after the radio, in the late 1920's, the television was invented. Regularly scheduled television programs were broadcast in the United States from 1928 (Miller, 1929). Both radio and television were, after sound recordings and cinema, the next mass media that were to become an important news source to the audience.

1.1 Early Theories

When the mass media started to become more important, it seemed evident that they had a great influence on the audience. A good example is the 1938 broadcast of Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds", after which thousands of people fled their homes and over one million were frightened (Pastel, R.H., 2002). Examples like these made scholars believe in the Hypodermic Needle Point Theory or Magic Bullet Theory (Fox, van Sickel & Steiger, 2001). The theory states that a media message is fired from the 'media gun' directly into the brain of the audience, who are then immediately influenced by this message. It claimed that the mass media were almighty and could control the people's minds. This theory was later disproved, but that does not mean that the media is not a powerful institution. Many more mass media theories were formulated over the years.

The next important theory was the Two Step Flow model of information (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1944), which states that that people are more influenced by interpersonal interaction than solely the media message itself. It claims that there are opinion leaders who pick up a message from the media, rephrase it according to their beliefs, and then interact about it with other people (Katz, 1955). The influence of the opinion leaders was much greater than of the media itself. This theory focuses on a more active audience than the hypodermic needle point theory.

The Uses and Gratifications model focuses on the receiver of the message and is based on an aggregation of research that was done in the 1940's (Ruggiero, 2000). All of the studies this model is based on formulated a list of functions which either the media message or the medium itself fulfilled to the audience (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973). The model received further attention throughout the decades that followed and it is still a very relevant model to this date.

Another influential theory came from Professor George Gerbner in 1976 and was called the Cultivation Theory (Gerbner, G. & Gross, L., 1976). The cultivation theory states that television can have a great influence in how we perceive social reality. Television shapes the views we have of the

real world around us. The theory proved that heavy TV viewers were much more influenced by how the world was framed by TV shows than light viewers. Heavy viewers think the real world reflects the world they see on television, and are for instance more fearful about the world. (Gerbner, G. & Gross, L., 1976; Shanahan, J. & Morgan, M., 1999) .

1.2 Agenda Setting Theory

Although the research paradigm has shifted from a passive audience to a more active audience, a large number of studies and theories still agree that the media are a very powerful means to influence people. One of these theories is the agenda setting theory, developed by Dr. Maxwell McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw (1972). The theory describes how traditional media can influence what is on the public's agenda, what they think about or what is important.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) did research on the 1968 American presidential elections in a study that has since been known as the 'Chapel Hill Study'. They interviewed 100 residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and asked them what they thought were the most important issues on the political agenda during the elections. They compared these issues with the local and national media coverage these issues received, and they found a very strong correlation. It appeared that the more coverage the issues got in the media, the more important these issues were perceived as by the voters. The media seemed to be able to take salient issues on their media agenda, and transfer them onto the public's agenda. In other words; the media tells us what to think about. McCombs and Shaw call this the Agenda-Setting theory. Since 1972, more than 400 studies have been performed on this theory, and to this date, the theory is still relevant (Delwiche, 2005; McCombs, 2004).

1.3 Social Media

The theories described above are relatively old when we look at mass media in its current form. The latest theory was developed in the seventies and since then, much has happened with regards to technological innovations and the way we use the media. The most important innovation that has come along is the Internet, which changed the landscape of news provision. People were suddenly able to address a large number of news sources directly, which gave them more freedom and independence in what news they would consume. More importantly, when forums, blogs and personal websites started to get the public's attention, the audience became capable of creating their own news stories. The internet gave the audience the possibility to give direct feedback on news stories and the media environment became interactive.

Although the traditional mass media sources are still among us, they are steadily being replaced by the internet. The newspapers still have a strong position in news provision, but they have seen their paper subscriptions decline for years in favor of their digital editions, and even those are in decline (Laeven, May 7, 2013). People seek for their news elsewhere and the constant connection of their smartphones to the internet provides that possibility. You can now watch TV, listen to the radio

and read the newspaper on your laptop, tablet or smartphone. A phenomenon that perfectly caters to this need is Social media, which changed the way the audience perceived the news.

After the internet bubble burst and Web 2.0 started, the internet became more and more interactive (O'Reilly, 2009). Social Networking Sites started to appear and become very popular. According to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networking sites are "*web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system*" (p.211). Early examples of such services are SixDegrees (1997), followed by Makeoutclub (1999) and Friendster (2002). MySpace (2003), LinkedIn (2003), Facebook (2004) and Twitter (2006) were launched shortly after and the social networking sites rapidly gained popularity (Abell, 2011; Arthur, 2009; Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Facebook, 2013; LinkedIn Press Centre, 2013; Maketoutclub, 2013; The Globe, 2013). The rising popularity of social networking sites is best illustrated by the sheer number of people that are active on these websites. On October 4 2012, Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, announced that Facebook reached the milestone of 1 billion monthly active members (Zuckerberg, October 4, 2013). Meanwhile, a French analyst group stated that on June 1st 2012, Twitter reached the 500 million users level (Lunden, 2012), although they have only 200 million active users (O'Carrol, 2012).

The way we use these social media websites differs from one another because of the websites' focus and possibilities. LinkedIn is concerned with people's corporate life. It is a good medium to form corporate relationships and find and offer jobs. Facebook is mostly used for keeping in touch with friends and forming personal relationships. People share photos and videos, engage in personal discourse with others and relate to groups and companies to form their online identity. Twitter is mainly focused on keeping track of rapidly changing subjects, news items and updates. The news value of this social medium is very high and the focus is less on personal relationships (Visualscope Studios, n.d.). This means that the subjects that are being discussed on these websites also differ from each other.

1.4 Citizen Journalism

With the rising popularity of the internet, people became more independent from traditional news media. Also, due to technological improvements and capabilities that people had, the public started to become able to create their own news stories. People made their own website or blog on which they commented on personal issues and the news, and these personal websites became an important news provider for people. This is well illustrated by an event like the 2004 tsunami in South East Asia. The amateur footage that was shot by civilians at that disaster became the most important source of information at that time, because the traditional media was not able to report on it themselves. The citizens took over, posting their footage on blogs an personal websites and those pictures and videos became the core footage which described this event. These audience participations

and user contributions to news content are examples of Citizen Journalism (Outing, 2005; Robinson & Robinson, 2006; Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010).

Now that social media has become so popular and number of people that use smartphones is growing, it seems that everyone can be a citizen journalist. In 2012, 92% of the Dutch people had access to the internet (Telecompaper, February 7, 2013) and 58% of the people had a smartphone (Oosterveer, 2012). Everybody is constantly online. Furthermore, smartphones have an integrated camera, which means people can take pictures and videos of anything they come across. Everyone constantly has the tools available to create and share their personal or more general news stories at any time and for a large audience. This trend is further being fuelled by social media, and a news oriented social medium like Twitter is especially suitable for news provision on the go.

1.5 Research Plan

The technological developments regarding the Internet and social media had a great effect on traditional mass media effects theories that have been studied earlier in this chapter. In this study, we want to focus on one of these theories that still appears to be relevant: The agenda-setting theory by McCombs and Shaw (1972). As stated earlier, the theory has received much attention over the years, but the last study that significantly added to the research field is from 2007 (Kim & Lee, 2007). The agenda-setting theory with regards to a new social medium like Twitter has, to the best of our knowledge, never been investigated before. This thesis will take the first step into investigating the implications that Twitter has for the agenda-setting theory. This research will take the same starting point as the early studies on the agenda-setting theory, and focus on politics. These implications will be studied by closely examining Twitter messages within a political database, to explore what triggered these messages, where they originated from, how they became a trend and what the consequences of these messages were. This study contributes to the existing literature by showing that even within a political dataset, there is an interaction between the traditional agenda-setting theory and a variation on agenda-setting theory that was recently developed, based on the topic that is being discussed.

2. Theoretical Framework

As stated earlier, the amount of research that has been done on the agenda-setting theory is immense. Over 400 studies have been completed and a broad scope of the entire theory has become clear (Delwiche, 2005; McCombs, 2004). However, since the arrival of social media and citizen journalism, there has, to the best of our knowledge, not been a relevant study on how the theory relates to these new developments. This study will attempt to deliver more insight into the implications of these developments by looking at the latest popular news provision tool; Twitter. This study investigates what implications Twitter has for the agenda-setting theory. The main research question for this study is formulated as follows:

"What implications does political Twitter discourse have for the agenda-setting theory?"

As this study further builds on the existing literature regarding the agenda-setting theory, this chapter first explains the content and meaning of the traditional agenda-setting theory. It then explores variations on the traditional theory that have been developed over the years. Subsequently citizen journalism and specifically Twitter will be discussed, after which the hypotheses will be formulated.

2.1 The Agenda-Setting Theory

As stated earlier, the agenda-setting theory was developed by Dr. Maxwell McCombs and Dr. Donald Shaw (1972). They did research on the 1968 presidential election in the town of Chapel Hill. They asked 100 voters in that town to list the most important issues on the political agenda at that time, and compared that list to how much media attention these items received. It became clear that the more an item was covered in the media, the more important the people perceived it to be. They called this effect the Agenda-Setting effect. Shortly explained, the agenda-setting theory means the following: "*Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, the mass media shape our perspectives of the world and focus our attention, influencing our views about what are the important topics of the day*"(McCombs, 1978, p. 90).

The media is capable of placing an item in the focus of public attention by establishing salience among the news items. Newspapers do this by the placement of a topic on a page, pictures, font size and the amount of space an article gets. Television news broadcasts establish salience by the order in which items are presented and the amount of time that is credited to an item. Placing an item in the focus of public attention is the first step towards public opinion. It is focused on an early stage in the process of building the public opinion; the moment an issue surfaces (McCombs, 1978).

Three different types of public agendas are distinguished. First, there is the intrapersonal agenda, which consists of issues that you personally find important. Second, there is the interpersonal agenda. Topics on this agenda are topics that you talk about or discuss with others. There may be a large degree of overlap between these two agendas, but there is always a distinction between the two.

The third and final agenda is the community agenda, or perceived-community agenda. This agenda consists of what a person believes are the most important issues within the community that he or she resides in. Topics on this agenda can differ for a great deal from the other two agendas. For instance, when elections are coming, unemployment can be a very salient issue in the media and on the community agenda. But when you personally have a steady job and income, you might be much less concerned with this issue. The issue may therefore be very high on the community and maybe even interpersonal agenda, but not at all on the intrapersonal agenda (McCombs & Bell, 1996).

McCombs (1978) states that there are at least three ways in which we can explain the influence of the media. First there is awareness. Often with news items, if the media does not mention them, then the people have no knowledge of them at all. It is a simple influence of knowing and not-knowing in which the media can make the difference. Then, there is the influence of priorities. The media prioritizes the subjects and determine what they find more important issues than others. As stated earlier, the audience has the tendency to copy these priorities from the media agenda onto the public agenda. In between these versions of influence is the third agenda setting effect, salience. The media puts more emphasis on one issue than it does on the other, after which one issue is regarded as more salient on the personal agenda. This does not mean that the priority list of the media is copied onto the personal agenda, but it does mean that the person experiences more distinction between subjects than with simple awareness.

2.2 Need for Orientation

Because people differ from one another, people are also influenced differently by agenda-setting. Whether the agenda-setting effect occurs, depends on the issue and on the person. One cause of this difference in influence on the audience is caused by the people's Need for Orientation. Matthes (2006) describes: "*The need for orientation (NFO) provides a psychological explanation for why people engage in information seeking and why some people are susceptible to agenda-setting effects while others are not*" (P.423). It is a psychological trait that can be seen in the light of the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). It states that people have an innate urge to understand the environment they are in. It is that uncertain and uncomfortable feeling people get when they are in new situation, for instance, while visiting an unfamiliar city. People keep that feeling until they have explored the situation and have an understanding of the outline of it.

The Need for Orientation is measured according to two factors; uncertainty and relevance. If an issue is not relevant for a person then the need for orientation is low. That person will then show no agenda-setting effects. When an issue is relevant for that person, the level of uncertainty becomes important. If that person has the feeling he fully understands the issue, then need for orientation will be moderate. For people that are uncertain about the issue, the need for orientation will be high and those people will show the most agenda-setting effects. People with a high need for orientation have a

strong tendency to seek information about a certain issue, which makes them more susceptible to agenda-setting effects (Matthes, 2006). Figure 1 illustrates the different levels of NFO.

| | | Uncertainty | |
		Low	High
Relevance	Low	Low Need for Orientation	Moderate Need for Orientation
	High	Moderate Need for Orientation	High Need for Orientation

Figure 1: Levels of NFO

Weaver proved that people with a high level of NFO focus more on political news, which led to stronger agenda-setting effects (1980). These results also occurred in a study by Shaw and McCombs (1977).

2.3 Framing

Focusing the public's attention towards a certain topic is not the only aspect in the concept of agenda setting theory. Besides making a distinction between the salience of issues, the issues themselves contain a number of attributes. These attributes are the details that define the issue, but they are not all considered to be as important or newsworthy as one another. Therefore, some attributes receive more attention in the media than others. The attributes of issues have their own agenda in the media because they determine how the public's view on the issue will be. Only mentioning an issue in the media results in the issue being placed on the public's agenda, but *how* people view that issue can also be influenced by what attributes of the issues are mentioned, and the emphasis that is placed on these attributes. In other words; the order in which the news is presented gives the public an idea of what the important issues are, the details that are presented about that certain issue determine the public's opinion and view on that certain issue. This is called second level agenda setting or framing effect (Becker & McCombs, 1978; McCombs, 1978; McCombs & Bell, 1996; Balmas & Sheafer, 2010). Scholars have been debating over these two terms, second level agenda setting and framing, for a while now. Some argue that second-level agenda-setting and framing are the same (Weaver, 2007; McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997), while others see the two as totally different phenomena (Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

2.4 Agenda-building

As the agenda-setting theory gained popularity, more scholars started to look at the roots of the messages that were being discussed. How were these messages constructed? When one looks at a agenda-setting study, one might notice that the message is suddenly there, created by the media. But the media does not simply 'come up' with a message. They do research, talk to people that are involved in the issue, look at existing reports and conduct interviews. This indicates that before the

media publishes a message, there has been a mutual influence between policymakers, the public and the media in creating salience among issues. Scholars that have been investigating this phenomenon call it Agenda-Building. (Cobb & Elder, 1983; Kiousis, Mitrook, Wu, & Seltzer, 2006). It is more concerned with message construction than media effects.

The difference between agenda-setting and agenda-building, according to Rogers and Dearing (1988), is that 'setting' refers to transferring the media agenda onto society and the public agenda. 'Building' focuses on a much broader picture, in which both media and public agendas influence the public policy. In agenda-building, all these groups, media, public and policymakers, are intertwined and there is a certain degree of reciprocity between society and the media (Lang & Lang, 1981; McCombs and Gilbert, 1986; Weaver & Elliot, 1985). Scholars have found that the media often simply passes along messages that have been set by societal institutions (Weaver & Elliot, 1985; Berkowitz, 1987). It seems that journalists do not seem to set the media agenda at all, but that the sources of the journalist shape the media agenda (Tanner, 2004).

2.5 Agenda-Melding Concept

Agenda-melding is a concept that followed both agenda-setting and agenda-building and was developed by Shaw, McCombs, Weaver and Hamm (1999). When the traditional mass media became a part of our lives, the supply of media channels was scarce. People were approached as one whole group and in a similar way, and the general public was seen as one single entity. As time went by, the supply and demand for a variety of media grew, and people eventually got to choose which medium and messages they wanted to follow. Internet, of course, played an important role in this development. People could now more specifically find others with matching interests and agendas, and because of the large variety of subjects and activities that can be found online, a new phenomenon appeared: the virtual communities. Virtual communities are specialized interest groups with members that have shared interest and are concerned with a very specific subject (Ragas & Roberts, 2009). Virtual communities have a collective agenda, and in order to join such a group one must adopt this agenda. People who want to belong to a community like this 'meld' their individual agendas with the group's agenda. This is what Shaw et al. (1999) call the Agenda-Melding concept.

2.6 Reversed Agenda-Setting

Kim Sung-Tae and Lee Young-Hwan (2007) wrote an article in which they attempted to find out what effects the changes in the media environment had on the agenda-setting theory. The reason for them to focus on this subject, was the rapidly growing popularity of the Internet in South Korea and the impact it had on the political, social and cultural sector. They saw a need to apply the new medium of internet to existing theories like the agenda-setting theory, which has only been tested on mass media like newspapers and television. Because of the importance and popularity of the internet, it is interesting to see how traditional mass media theories have held up or evolved.

In their research, they found ten cases in which the agenda-setting theory had evolved into what they call 'reversed agenda-setting'. The ten cases their articles focuses on, describe occasions in which a single person posts his concern online, on either a message board, forum of micro website. This concern was then shared on a massive scale by others and the issue became an online trend. Online news websites then picked up the issue and eventually even the traditional mass media covered the issue. As an example, a summary was made of one of these cases.

During the Korea-Japan 2002 World Cup Games, on June 13, an accident took place in which two girls were killed by a US armored vehicle. The incident received some mentions in the traditional media but it never became a major headline because the main topic of the news was the world cup event. The issue seemed to be forgotten until the trial against the US troops started at the end of November. On November 27, an unknown net user posted a message on a website's free debate room in which he proposed a candle light vigil on November 30th. The message spread rapidly across the internet and was soon picked up by OhMyNews, an independent online newspaper which reported on the vigil and posted an article about it. Vigils went on and eventually caused debates on the US – Korean Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and it became a focal point leading up to the elections in Korean parliament. The vigils even received attention from the US government and foreign media and on December 14th, the day of the largest assembled vigil, drew an official apology from US President George W. Bush (Kim &Lee, 2007).

 The issue was raised online by one single person, and became an issue on the public agenda. Not because of traditional media, but because of the interactivity of the Internet and the determination of the audience. This is an example of what Kim and Lee call reversed agenda-setting (2007).

2.7 Citizen Journalism

Although Kim and Lee (2007) did not mention it explicitly, what all the ten cases in their study describe are examples of Citizen Journalism. Luke Goode (2009) defines Citizen Journalism as: "*a range of web-based practices whereby 'ordinary' users engage in journalistic practices. Citizen journalism includes practices such as current affairs-based blogging, photo and video sharing, and posting eyewitness commentary on current events* (p.1288)". Although this definition puts an emphasis on the web-based practice of citizen journalism, there are examples of citizen journalism before all the technological innovations. For example: the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963. The famous video was shot by an ordinary citizen, Abraham Zapruder, and became one of the earliest examples of citizen journalism (Sambrook, 2009). Still, the term did not become very common, until the arrival of the internet and its growing popularity and possibilities.

Citizen journalism is focused around a very active audience. The public has the technological capabilities to immediately give feedback to news stories. They can comment on events that they are witnessing, like a concert or a city council meeting. They can leave comments on news stories, videos and photos and edit and share these through other media. They can check news stories for facts and

post their findings on their weblog, homepage or online profile. The most famous examples of citizen journalism are those in which the audience itself 'produces' the news. In an example like the 2004 Tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, citizen journalists played a vital role in expressing what took place that day. During the tsunami aftermath, there was a lack of information about what exactly had happened en what the scale of the disaster was. Traditional media were not present to actually report on the event as it was going on. In the days after the disaster, many amateur videos and photos turned up on blogs which played a vital role in describing what had happened. As James Surowiecki describes in his February 2005 Ted Talk about the turning point for social media:

> What you had was a group of essentially unorganized, unconnected writers, video bloggers, etcetera, who were able to come up with a collective portrait of a disaster that gave us a much better sense of what it was like to actually be there, than the mainstream could give us. (Surowiecki, 2005)

2.8 Citizen Journalism and Social Media

Since the turn of the century, there have been some other great examples of citizen journalism that became a prime source of information and news through social media. Examples are the Arab Spring in 2010, the Iranian election protest in 2009, or even more recent, the Turkish protest in 2013. Because of the restrictions that traditional journalists had to publish news stories about these events, the public took over and reported the raw and sometimes shocking footage themselves. Citizens took over the role of reporters when they themselves could not do their work. But this is not the only case when citizens take over. Think about the meteor that landed in Russia on February the 15th 2013 (Nu.nl, February 15, 2013). Traditional media could never have been able to capture the footage that the citizens did, because they could not respond fast enough. Therefore, the amateur footage became the primary source of news footage. It is incidents like these that made citizen journalism famous and a valuable addition to traditional journalism.

2.9 Twitter

Although weblogs or personal websites are suitable media for citizen journalism, with the rise in popularity of social media a new tool has become available which lends itself perfectly for citizen journalism: Twitter.

Twitter was launched in 2006 and has since grown to become the biggest micro blogging service in the world. In May 2012, there were 500 million registered Twitter users, sending an average of 58 million messages per day (Statistic Brain, n.d.). Twitter users can send messages of 140 characters long called tweets. With these messages, they can comment on or talk about any subject they can imagine. By using a '#' or hashtag in front of a topic or word, people can let others know what they are talking about, and you can see what is being said about that topic by others. Users can

start conversations with other users by mentioning them in their message by using a '@', followed by the account name of the person they want to contact. Users can follow the message of others, which appear on their message board, and be followed by others. They can also share messages from others, by 'retweeting' that message. One of the appealing aspects of Twitter is that you don't need to be friends with the people you follow. This means that users can also follow the Twitter activity of people they are interested in or who they admire, like athletes, politicians and musicians.

Whereas other social media like LinkedIn of Facebook are primarily used for creating and maintaining corporate or social relationships, Twitter has been found to be primarily used for news gathering (Visualscope Studios, n.d.). It has become a very important medium for millions of people to stay updated, not only on status updates from friends, but also from news media. The fact that a message contains only 140 characters makes it an ideal tool to raise interest in a news article, and refer to the website of the source. This is the reason why news corporations use Twitter to quickly inform the audience about news in real-time.

2.10 Hypotheses

The research question for this study, as stated earlier in this chapter, is: "What implications does political Twitter discourse have for the agenda-setting theory?" In order to provide an answer to this research question, three hypotheses are formulated which will be investigated in this research. These hypotheses are explained below.

This research is the first study that focuses on the effects that Twitter has on the agenda-setting theory. Because the focus of the earliest studies surrounding the agenda setting theory was on politics, this study will do the same. Political debate and deliberations on Twitter have previously been investigated by other scholars (Bruns, 2010; Shamma, Kennedy & Churchill, 2010; Larsson & Moe, 2012). Although these studies were aimed at categorizing Twitter messages' content and did not study the agenda-setting theory, they noticed that that spikes in Twitter activity regarding politics seemed to be dependent on traditional media coverage of political debates or events. Unfortunately, this was not further elaborated, but this does indicate traditional agenda-setting effects. This must therefore be further examined to confirm their observations.

The results of the aforementioned studies occurred in Sweden, Australia and the United States. Because the role and freedom of the media in the Netherlands is similar to those countries, similar results are expected. This leads to Hypothesis 1:

H1: Twitter discourse on political subjects will be determined by traditional media sources, therefore indicating agenda-setting effects.

The above mentioned studies focused on 'political data' as a whole. No distinction was made between different subjects within that dataset. There might, however, be big differences in Twitter

data, depending on the political subject that is being discussed. Some subjects are simply more interesting to the public than others. In response to the studies described above, other scholars have found that the Twitter agenda and the media agenda are likely to differ in a political dataset. The reason is that events and themes that are discussed on Twitter are filtered by the public's established set of interests and news frames, which results in a difference between the attention of the Twitter discourse and media attention (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2012). This contradicts the agenda-setting theory and suggests that the level of influence of traditional media is dependent on the subject at hand. To test whether this is true, Hypothesis 2 and 3 were formulated to get a complete picture of the difference there might be between topics within a political dataset. First the traditional media influence of a subject that is primarily of political concern will be compared to the traditional media influence on a subject that is both of public and political concern.

       H2: A subject from a political dataset that is both highly of public and political concern, will show less agenda-setting effects than a purely political subject.

       To get a complete picture, a subject that is of no concern to politics must also be retracted from the political database. According to the studies by described above, a subject that is of high public interest and no interest to politics will not be mentioned in the traditional media. The public will then determine the discourse on Twitter, instead of the traditional media. If such a subject is high enough on the public's agenda, the subject could become an online trend. It could then follow the same steps that the examples in Kim and Lee's study (2007) followed, and show reversed agenda-setting effects. To test this, Hypothesis 3 is formulated:

       H3: A subject that is not related to politics will show no agenda setting effects, but strong reversed agenda setting effects.

3. Methodology

3.1 Creating the Database

Because this thesis takes first steps in investigating the agenda-setting theory with regards to Twitter, it is important to start at the basis of the theory to lay the same foundation as the initial theory did. Because the agenda setting theory was formulated around politics this study focuses on politics as well. To get as much relevant political information on Twitter as possible, a database had to be created that gathered and stored all the political messages that were sent through Twitter. This was made possible with the help of LiveWall. LiveWall is an organization that makes analyses of social media and gives insight in social media volume and subjects. They track and store all the data that comes across social media regarding a certain subject or company. LiveWall was willing to share their knowledge and expertise to gather, store and analyze this data for this study.

In this study, the focus is on news stories that were being discussed on Twitter. The problem is that it is impossible to predict the news, so following news items themselves will result in incomplete data. As soon as one starts to follow an established news item, it is impossible to detect why it became a news item in the first place and who initiated it. In order to capture all discourse surrounding political news, general political terms were tracked and stored that were often mentioned when people talk about politics. These terms were:

- Names and official accounts of the political parties that are active in the second chamber;
- Names and accounts of the 13 ministers and 7 state secretaries;
- Names and accounts of all party chairmen and chairwomen;
- General terms that are often used in political discourse, like 'Minister', 'Kabinet', etc

The reason that only these common terms were used, is that when a message is political, one of these keywords will also be mentioned in the message. The political news stories that are being talked about by the public will then automatically be collected. A complete list of the subjects that were tracked is displayed in Appendix 1. All these terms were divided over 14 different LiveWall accounts, because Twitter inhibits anyone from tracking a large amount of keywords on a single account. The data was gathered from March 21st until May 6th. In this period of time, some important political events took place and a sufficient amount of data was gathered to perform a fruitful analysis.

LiveWall helped selecting the subjects and arranging the LiveWall accounts. At the end of the data gathering period, the data was collected and combined in a file with CSV-format. The dataset contained 805.442 messages. Because some messages contained more than one relevant subject, there was a large amount of duplicate messages in the dataset. After removing these duplicates, 665.300 unique messages remained. The next step was to find relevant news items that could answer the research question.

3.2 Selecting News Items

During the data gathering period, several political newsworthy events took place on which this study could focus. A motion of distrust was filed against state secretary Fred Teeven, after Aleksandr Dolmatov, a Russion asylum seeker who was wanted by the Russian authorities, had killed himself in a detention centre after receiving the news that he had to return to Russia. Also, a motion of distrust was filed against state secretary Frans Weekers. He was responsible for solving a fraud case involving a group of Bulgarians, which he handled incompetently according to the opposition. Jeroen Dijsselbloem, chairman of the Eurogroup, was also in the news after he made some remarks about the Cyprus support package. Because of the limited time there was to write the thesis and the intensive analysis that had to be done on the dataset, a careful decision had to be made on which subjects were most interesting to look at. The following four subjects were chosen from the dataset, each having a different level of political and public importance.

The social agreement is an arrangement between the government, the employee's unions and the employers organizations. It entails specific agreements between all three parties with regards to salary development and working conditions. The agreement was reached on April 11th. It then caused a large amount of news messages, twitter discourse and debate amongst the public, other politicians and the media. This is an example of a high political concern, because the public had no influence in these decisions at all. Also, while negotiating the terms of the agreement, no citizens or journalists could be present. All news came from press conferences and news releases. This is therefore an ideal subject to test Hypothesis 1 with.

The second subject is Russian president Vladimir Putin, who came to the Netherlands to celebrate the 400 year relationship between Russia and the Netherlands. At first, this seemed as an entirely political subject, but during the day there were protests by Dutch and Russian citizens who wanted Putin to account for the human rights violations regarding Pussy Riot and Alexandr Dolmatov in Russia. During the official ceremonies and talks between Queen Beatrix, Rutte and Putin, no journalists or citizens were allowed to be present. However, as these talks went on, there was a large crowd of people demonstrating against Putin in front of the building they were in. Although citizens did not get a chance to be a part of the ceremonies, citizens did make their mark on the day and they made the news (Mazel, April 8, 2013; Sikma, April 8, 2013). Like the social agreement, this was supposed to be a very political subject, but citizens took action to voice their concern on the matter. Public concern is higher in this matter than with the social agreement, therefore making it a suitable subject to investigate Hypothesis 2 with.

The abdication of Queen Beatrix and crowning of King Alexander was one of the most important national events in the Netherlands in 2013. Because the King or Queen is the formal head of government in the Netherlands, this was an important item on the political agenda. Also, April 30th, the day of the abdication, has been Queensday in the Netherlands since 1949. It is a national holiday which is accompanied by a large number of celebrations throughout the country. For the Dutch

citizens, it is a very enjoyable and eventful day because of the celebrations and because of the popularity of the royal family (Ipsos, 2013). This in an important event for both politics and the people, even more important on both fronts than Putin's visit. Because of the very high degree of public concern, this message is also suitable to test Hypothesis 2 with.

Similar to the studies by Maireder and Ausserhofer (2012) and Bruns and Burgess (2011), a subject was discovered in the dataset with no initial political relevance at all, which did receive attention on Twitter. This subject is the King's Song. The King's song was an official part of the abdication ceremony and was a gift of the people to the new King. The song was composed and performed by a large number of Dutch artists, and the intention was that the whole country would sing this song together for the new King on April 30th. As soon as the song was released, an enormous amount of negative criticism was posted on social media. This is also clearly visible in the dataset of study. Because there is no clear link to politics at first, and the public was highly concerned with this subject, this is a suitable subject to test Hypothesis 3 with.

3.3 General Analysis

Out of the source file of 665.300 messages, columns were deleted that were of no interest to this study. These columns consisted of data that is used by LiveWall for their business practices and have no value to this study. Then, all messages regarding the selected subjects were filtered out and copied to separate individual working files to be analyzed. To get a clear view of the information flow, a graph was made for each subject to see when the most messages were sent about the subject, and what days would be most interesting to analyze.

The analysis of these news items consisted of two parts. First, a quantitative analysis of each dataset was performed to determine which messages were the most influential. With use of the sorting and filtering options and the IF function in Microsoft Excel, the messages that received the most attention in the form of retweets and mentions were determined. Consequently, a qualitative analysis of these messages was done by closely examining each message, to determine:

- The source of the message. Was it sent by a traditional media source or a citizen?;
- The content of the message. Does it relate to a traditional media source? Is it an individual opinion? Is it a response to someone else's message? Is it a retweet?;
- The consequences of the message. Was it picked up by traditional media? Did it spark a political debate?

With the gathered information from this analysis, the implications of political Twitter data on the agenda setting theory can be determined and the research question can be answered.

3.4 Method per Subject

Although the same method of analysis was used for each subject, they all had their own variations in data preparation. Therefore, a short but detailed outline is given for the specific data preparation of each subject.

3.4.1 Social Agreement

The words 'social' and 'agreement' both have a very general meaning. Therefore, filtering the dataset on those terms individually would result in a polluted dataset with messages unrelated to the social agreement. Therefore, messages were only selected that specifically contained 'social agreement' ('sociaal akkoord' in Dutch) in the text. By using only these keywords together, it is certain that all messages in the dataset are relevant for this subject.

3.4.2 Putin

In the timeframe in which the data was gathered, the only time that president Putin was a relevant news item was when he visited the Netherlands. Filtering on the keyword 'Putin' (Poetin in Dutch) would therefore result in a dataset that is relevant for this subject. After skimming through the dataset, it appeared there was some pollution in the data. This was caused by retweeted messages of user @Raspoetin69. These messages were not relevant to this subject, but were gathered because the username contained 'Poetin'. Therefore, 56 irrelevant messages that contained references to @Raspoetin69 were deleted.

3.4.3 Abdication of Queen Beatrix

On April 30, a large number of events were important. There was the abdication, the throne exchange and all sorts of festivities regarding Queensday. People commented on this event by using words like 'crown', 'abdication', 'throne exchange', etcetera. To make sure all this data is taken into account, all messages with the following keywords were incorporated in the data (translated): King, Willem-Alexander, Abdication, Throne exchange, Throne an Crowning. The reason that terms like Queen Beatrix or Máxima were not used, is that both these royals have a busy schedule and appear in public regularly. The focus of the throne exchange is mainly on the new king, as Beatrix will only be involved in the first part of the day. Incorporating these two keywords would result in a large amount of pollution in the dataset. Furthermore, 'Queen' will still be included in the dataset, since the Dutch word for king, 'koning', is part of the Dutch word for queen: 'koningin'.

Furthermore, after skimming through the dataset, some pollution was detected. User @Koningin_nl is a fake account that comments on royal affairs in a funny way. It got 2.029 mentions in the dataset without it being relevant for this subject. These 2.029 messages were deleted.

3.4.4 King's Song

In English, both 'king' and 'song' are general terms. In Dutch, the King's Song translates to 'Koninglied'. This word did not exist in the Dutch language until it became part of the official throne exchange ceremony. Therefore, following the word 'koningslied' would result in relevant data for this analysis. No pollution was discovered in this dataset so all messages were relevant for this study.

3.4 Citizen journalism vs. Traditional media

For the analysis of the results, it is important to outline where traditional media stops and where citizen journalism begins. Newspapers, magazines, books, radio and TV are considered to be traditional media in this study. All messages that are sent by people or organizations that represent one of these media will be considered traditional media sources. All other messages sent by people with no relations to traditional media will be considered citizen journalism. In this dataset, a large amount of messages sent by politicians are expected to appear. Although politicians have an important relationship with the media, they do not work for the media, nor is it their responsibility to create news stories. As politicians do not represent a traditional media source, their messages will be considered as citizen journalism.

4. Results

Below the results of the study are discussed. All Twitter messages that are discussed in the following chapter, are mentioned in Appendix 2.

4.1 Social Agreement

The dataset of the social agreement contained 6 208 messages of the total of 665 300 messages. This is 0.93% of all the data. The way the data is distributed across the dataset is displayed in Figure 2.
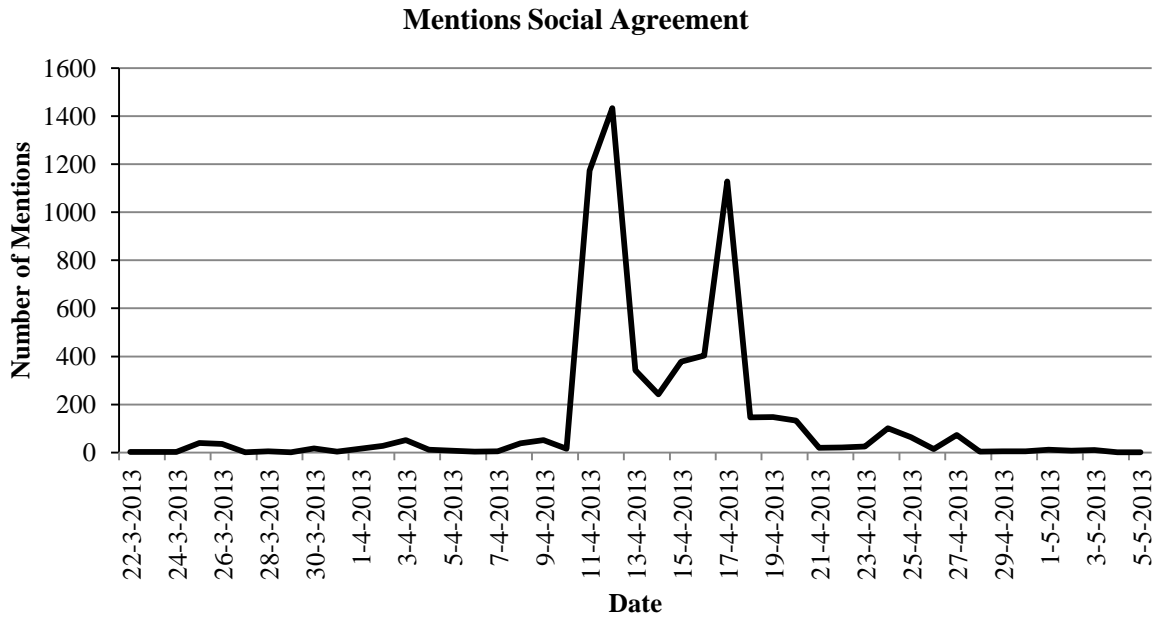
Mentions Social Agreement

Figure 2: Mentions of the social agreement.

There are three peaks visible in this data set, on April 11, 12 and 17. The peak of April 11 consists of 1 173 messages and makes up 18.9% of the data of the Social agreement. These messages are distributed through the day as displayed in Figure 3.
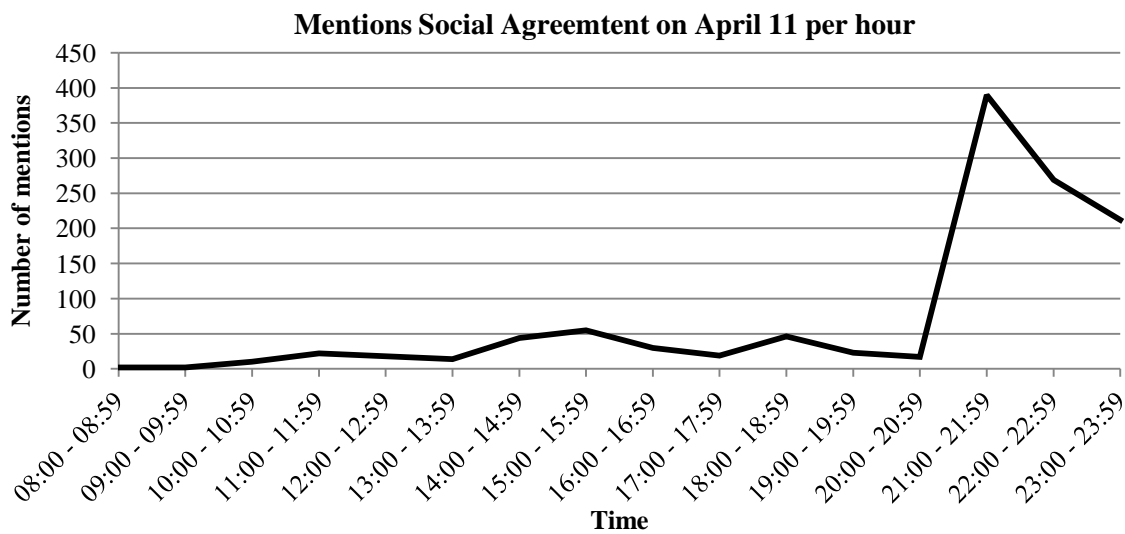
Mentions Social Agreemtent on April 11 per hour

Figure 3: Mentions Social Agreement on April 11 per hour

As the graph shows, most messages on April 11 were sent after 21:00. There were three messages that stood out on this day in terms popularity. An important message came from Prime Minister Rutte's official account (@minpres), receiving 44 retweets or mentions and making up 3.8% of the data on April 11. A quote by Jeroen Dijsselbloem was directly retweeted 20 times and links to media sources that reported on this quote were shared an additional 40 times, making up 5.1% of the day's data. The most popular message of the day comes from an article posted on Nu.nl. The mention of the article through the Nu.nl Twitter account received 16 retweets, but the article itself was mentioned 220 times, making it the most popular message of the day with 18.8% of the data. This message, which states "The cabinet agrees with social agreement", is displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Twitter message Nu.nl about the Social Agreement on April 11.

On April 12, the biggest peak of the dataset is visible with 1 434 messages, making up 23.1% of the entire dataset on the social agreement. The way the messages were distributed throughout the day is displayed in Figure 5.
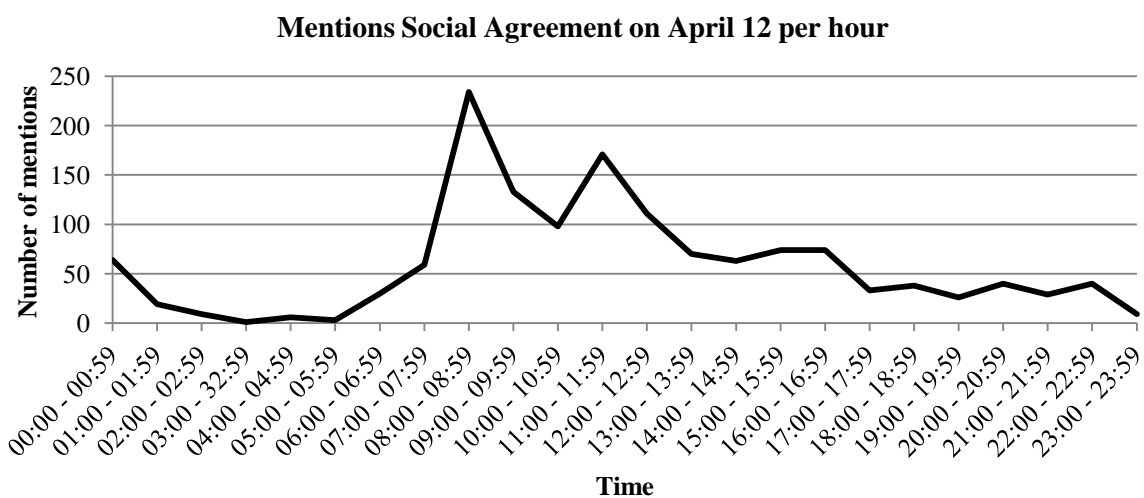

Figure 5: Mentions Social Agreement on April 12 per hour

On April 12, there are several popular messages that received more than 20 mentions or retweets. Several media that reported on interviews with Minister Kamp (41 mentions, 2.9%) and Minister Schippers (52 mentions, 3.6%), for instance. Also, a message from CDA second chamber member Pieter Omtzigt, which commented on campaign posters of the VVD was mentioned 48 times (3.3%). The second most popular message came from Nu.nl with 56 messages. This was the same message that was sent on April 11, making up 3.9% of the data on April 12. All these percentages are

very low. There was only one message that stood out on this day. It was a message by PVV leader Geert Wilders that is displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Twitter message Geert Wilders on April 12th regarding the social agreement.

Translated, this message says: "Clumsy social agreement solves nothing. Without tax reduction no economic recovery. The demolition of the Netherlands continues #thanksrutte". This message was retweeted 324 times, making up 22.6% of the messages of April 12 and causing the first peak that is visible in Figure 5.

The third peak in the total social agreement dataset, as displayed in Figure 2, is shown on April 17. This day generated 1 128 messages, 18.2% of the social agreement dataset. The distribution of messages during the day is displayed in Figure 7.
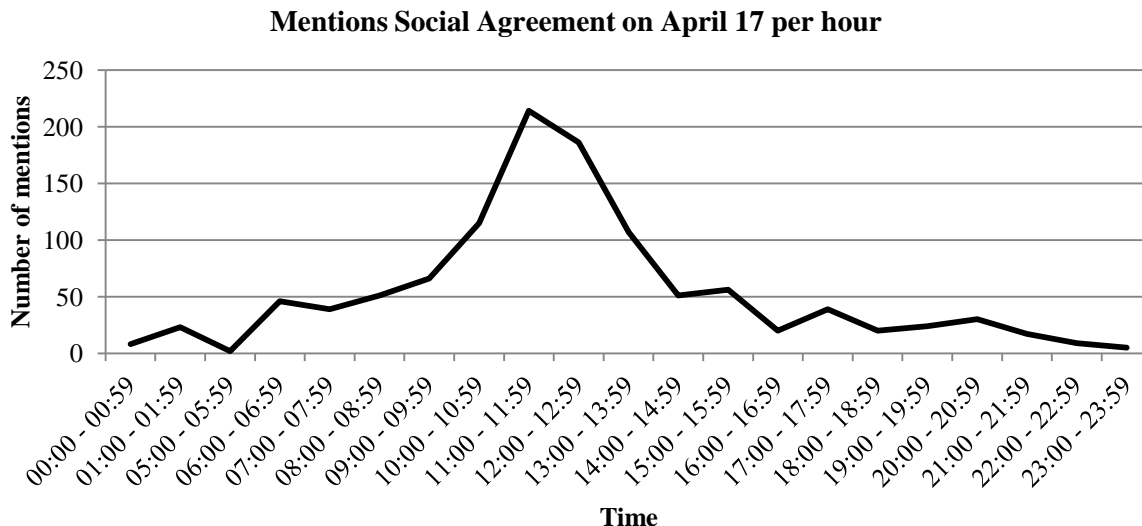

Mentions Social Agreement on April 17 per hour

Figure 7: Mentions Social Agreement on April 17 per hour

On April 17, there are several messages that stand out in the dataset. First, several traditional media report on the fact that the VVD fraction was pressured to sign the agreement. This received 113 messages (10.0%). Second, there were two different messages that both linked to an article in the Volkskrant which states that young people are being abandoned in this social agreement. One source is D66 council member Joost Sneller, who references to the Volkskrant directly (61 messages, 5.4%) and the other is the Volkskrant itself (37 messages, 3.3%) generating 98 messages (8.7%). Then there are

three different people who all comment in a similar way on Diederik Samsom. Lilian Marijnissen sends two messages that generate 10 (0.89%) and 16 mentions (1.4). Paul Ulenbelt sends two messages that generate 47 (4.2%) and 38 messages (3.4%). Sadet Karabulut sends one message that generates 31 messages (2.7%). All 3 persons are members of the SP and all 5 messages combined generate 142 messages, which make up 12.6% of the data.

The results in this case indicate that the primary news sources of this topic come from either politicians or the traditional media. Messages by politicians stand out the most and they voice their opinion or comment during live debates. Traditional media report on interviews and press conferences. No messages from citizens that are not involved in politics got enough attention in the dataset to stand out.

4.2 Putin

Of the complete dataset of 665 300 messages, 2 477 (0.37%) contained a mention of President Vladimir Putin. The way this data was distributed across the dataset is displayed in Figure 8.
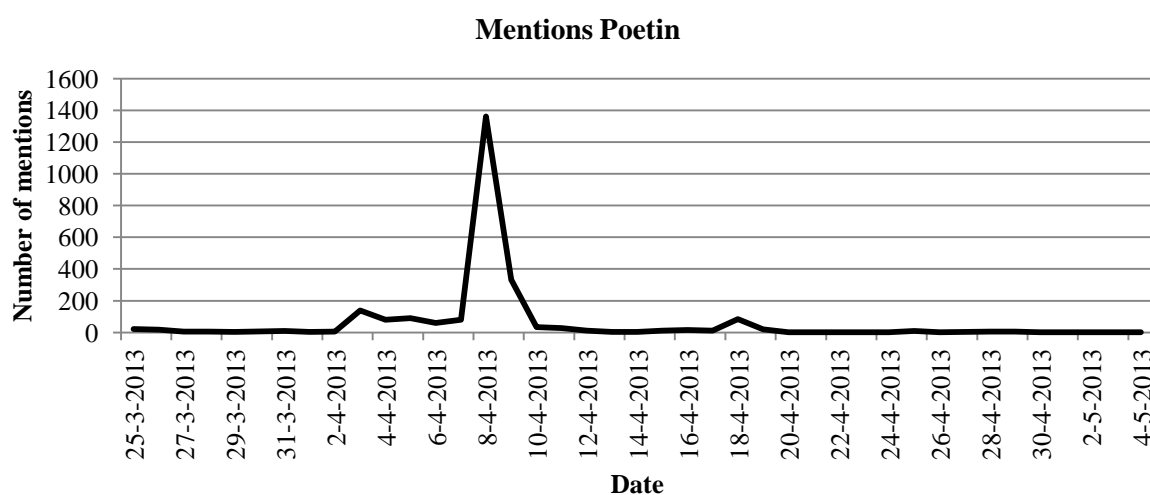
Mentions Poetin

Figure 8: Mentions of Putin

Figure 8 shows one single peak that clearly stands out in the dataset. The peak occurs on April 8, the day of Putin's visit, and generates 1 362 messages. This is 55.0% of the entire dataset. The second largest number of messages was sent on April 9th, with 332 messages (13.4%).

On April 8, several messages are retweeted or mentioned several times. A message by multiple traditional news sources, which states that the talks between Rutte and Putin have started, received 51 (3.7%) mentions or retweets. Two messages by journalists Chris Klomp (@chrisklomp) and Gerd de Smyter (@smyter) commented on Rutte's sexual orientation. They both received respectively 55 (3,7%) and 27 (2.0%) messages, making up 6.0% of the day's data together. The most popular single message of the day came from Michiel Veenstra (@michielveenstra), a popular Dutch radio DJ. His message is displayed in Figure 9 and received 47 (3.5%) retweets and mentions on April 8 and 7 on April 9, 54 (4.0%) in total.

Figure 9: Twitter message by Michiel Veenstra about Putin on April 8.

Translated, this message means: "Putin points Rutte delicately to the non-restrictions to a pedo(phile)-club and a political party in the 2nd chamber which women cannot join #score".

The most popular message of April 9 comes from a fake account of Queen Beatrix, Koningin_nl. The message states that Putin thinks that allowing a group of 60 pedophiles and a splinter party is the same as state terror. This message receives 32 of the day's 332 messages, making up 9.6% of the data. A message by author Barry Smit (@barrysmit) on April 18, in which he criticizes Putin and Teeven about the Alexandr Dolmatov controversy gets 24 mentions and retweets, that is 28% of the day.

The results show that no single message received more than 52 mentions or retweets, which means no message made up more than 2.1% of the data. This indicates that a large amount of the data was made up of messages that received no or little attention from other people on Twitter. The messages that do stand out are sent by traditional media sources and one fake account. The traditional media sources that stand out share their opinion on Putin's visit instead of referring to a news story or event.

4.3 Throne exchange

The total dataset of the throne exchange consists of 13 439 messages, which is 2.0% of the entire database. These messages were distributed over time as displayed in Figure 10.
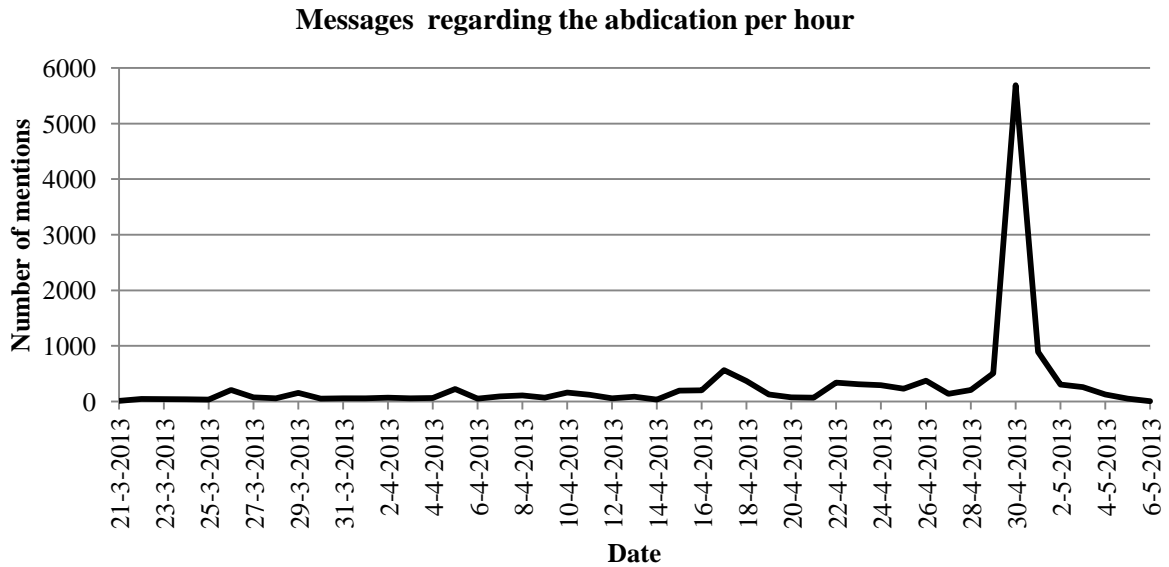
Messages regarding the abdication per hour

Figure 10: Messages regarding the abdication per day

The biggest peak of the dataset, with 5 691 messages, or 42.3% of the data occurs on April 30th, the day of the abdication and throne exchange. The distribution of sent messages during the day of the abdication is displayed in Figure 11.
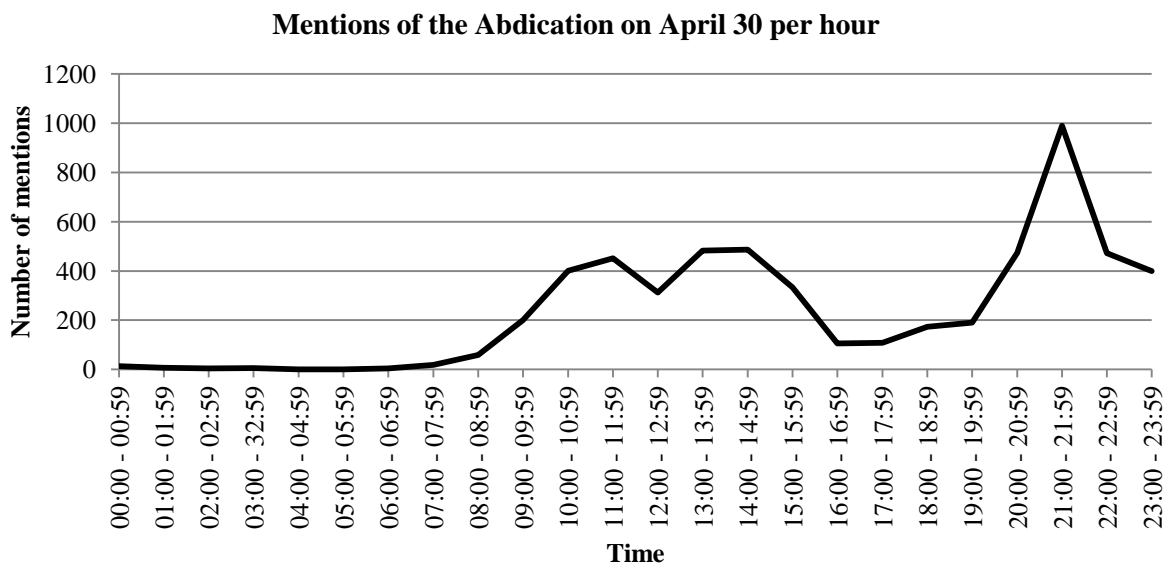
Mentions of the Abdication on April 30 per hour

Figure 11: Messages regarding the abdication on April 30 per hour

During the day, several messages stood out in popularity. The messages that received more than 50 retweets and mentions are discussed this section. The first popular message was caused by a comment of Rutte during a TV interview, who said that the abdication was an 'emotional moment'. It received 80 mentions and makes up 1.41% of the day's messages. Not long after this message, several traditional media report that "Belgium congratulates the Dutch king". This messages was mentioned 71 times, that is in 1.2% of the messages. Then, a message from a Dutch comedian and TV presenter,

Jörgen Raymann, in which he makes fun of Wilders receives 91 mentions and retweets (1.6%). The message by Geert Wilders that is displayed in Figure 12 was mentioned 129 times, which is 2.3% of the day's data.

Figure 12: Twitter message by Geert Wilders who comments on the day's events on April 30th

In this message he states: "Nice day today. The Netherlands have a new King. Beautiful picture of princess Beatrix and the three little princesses in the New Church". Another popular message came from travel journalist Jelle Corstius (@jellebc) and is displayed in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Twitter message by Jelle Corstius about the ministers on the bus on April 30th.
Translation: "Abdication-bus". I dare to say that this is only possible in the Netherlands. (Does Rutte think he's going on a school trip?)". This messages got 218 retweets and made up 3.8% of the day's data. The most important message, however, is displayed in Figure 14 and was sent by BNR Newsradio reporter Harmen van der Veen (@Harmen_vd_veen).

Figure 14: Twitter message by Harmen van der Veen: 'the most beautiful photo' of April 30th

The translation of the message is: "The most beautiful picture of today: taken by our prime minister… #BNR #Throne". This messages was retweeted or directly mentioned 1 564 times on April 30th, 1 858 times in total. This means the messages made up 27.5% of the messages on April 30th and 13.8% of the entire dataset, making it the most popular message by far.

The most popular messages within the Throne Exchange dataset were almost exclusively sent by traditional media. The only exception is the message by Geert Wilders in which he shared is opinion of the day. Furthermore, traditional media determine the conversation. They both share news stories (congratulations by Belgium) as well as comment on ongoing events (Jelle Corstius).

4.4 King's Song

The total number of messages in the King's Song database is 3 436, which is 0.52% of the entire database of 665 300 messages. The way the messages were distributed across the dataset is displayed in Figure 15. In this dataset, three peaks are clearly visible on April 19, 21 and 24.
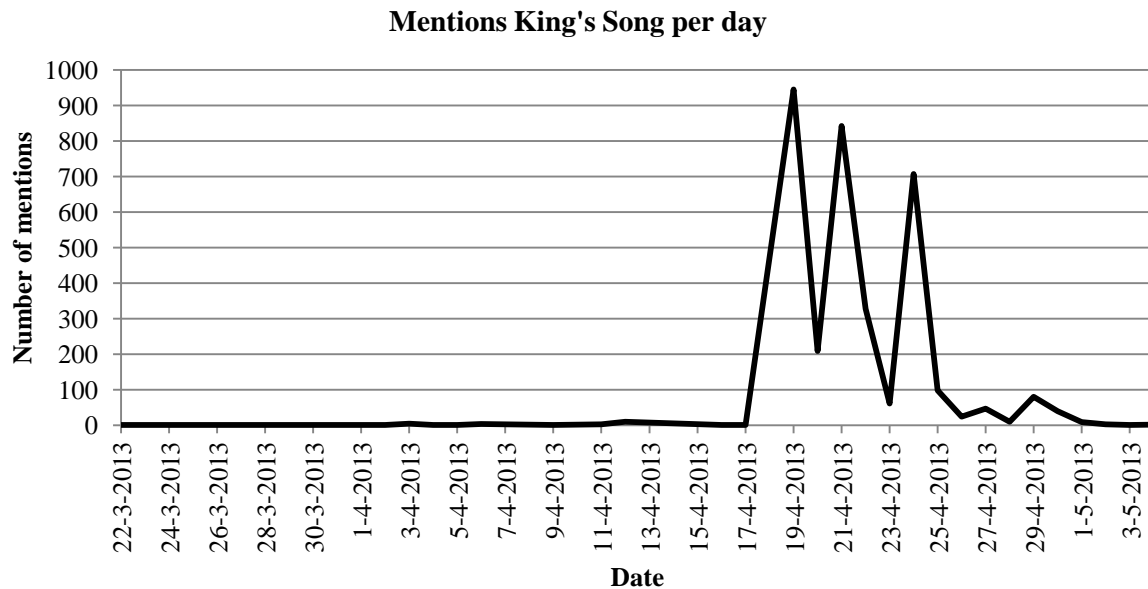
Figure 15: Mentions of the King's Song per day

On April 19th, three messages receive the most attention. First, writer Ozcan Akyol (@ozkcanakyol) claims the language errors in the song were put in to represent PVV-voters. It is mentioned in 37 of the 945 messages that day, making up 3.9% of the data. A message by PvdD leader Marianne Thieme in which she states that the King's Song by Dutch comedian André van Duin is catchier receives 66 mentions (7.0%). The most popular message of the day is displayed in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Twitter message Rob Hoogland regarding the King's Song on April 19th

Translated, his message means: "Right, so Fred Teeven stays. But what happens to Jet Bussemaker? She is in charge of culture. #Kingssong". This was sent by Rob Hoogland, columnist for newspaper Telegraaf. The message is mentioned 185 times on April 19th, making up 19.6% of all the messages that day.

On April 21st, the second peak in the King's Song dataset is visible and it consists of 842 messages. Three messages were the most popular during this day, all receiving above 80 mentions or retweets. A message by citizen Alex Ringeling (@bas_taart) wich states: "So we can destroy a King's Song on Twitter, but the cabinet is still there. We're doing something wrong", was mentioned 60 times, making up 7.1% of the day's data and 84 times in total (9.9%). A message by RTL news reader

Jan de Hoop (@jandehoop) which states: "King's Song was the opening of the NOS news. This afternoon an emergency session of the cabinet. North-Korea has not responded yet", was mentioned 121 times, or in 14.4% of the messages. The most popular message of the day was sent by PvdD leader Marianne Thieme and is displayed in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Twitter message of Marianne Thieme regarding the King's Song on April 21ˢᵗ

The translation of this message is: "Now that the official King's song has been withdrawn, the only option is to deploy the back-up song". This message was mentioned 123 times, making up 14.6% of the data.

The peak of April 24 consists of 707 messages. The discussion is mostly concerned with Minister of Education Jet Bussemaker, who wants the language errors in the King's Song to be corrected before singing it to the King. In 707 messages, Bussemaker is mentioned 505 times, which is in 71.4% of the messages. The article by news site Nu.nl is mentioned 41 times (5.8%), the daily newspapers Telegraaf 65 times (9.2%) and Volkskrant 22 times 3.1%, and magazine Elsevier 24 times (3.4%). In total, these traditional media caused 21.5% of the messages and no other single message stood out in the dataset.

In this dataset, messages from citizens and traditional media both stand out. Rob Hoogland, journalist for Telegraaf sends a popular message, as well as politician Marianne Thieme. Furthermore, a message from a citizen with no relationship to the media or politics stands out. On April 24ᵗʰ, traditional media clearly determines the conversation, but on the other peak days both the traditional media as citizens determine the conversation.

5. Discussion

Based on the result section that was discussed above, in this chapter the hypotheses and research question will be answered. Furthermore, theoretical and practical implications of this study will be discussed, as well as limitations of this study and implications for further research.

5.1 Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 was tested with the social agreement case. The prediction was that there would be strong agenda setting effects in this case, because of the highly political nature of the subject. In order to test this prediction, several things needed to become clear in the analysis. First, what the most important messages regarding this subject were. This was established in the result section above. Then, the origin of these messages had to be determined. As can be seen in the result section, all messages that received the most attention on Twitter, were either sent by traditional media or by politicians. Politicians voiced their opinion on the social agreement, like Geert Wilders on April 12, or commented on a live debate, like SP members Marijnissen, Ulenbelt and Karabulut on April 17. Traditional media reported on press conferences, like Nu.nl on April 11, or commented on the content of the agreement, like the Volkskrant on April 17.

When looking at the content of the two most popular messages in this case, conclusions can be drawn in favor of the agenda setting theory. The second most popular message came from news website Nu.nl and was retweeted 16 times. The article it referenced to was shared 220 times. In light of the agenda setting theory, a short conclusion can be drawn: this was a message from a traditional media source which received enough attention from the public to stand out in the dataset. The message develops in a similar way that Shaw and McCombs (1972) described, therefore showing strong agenda setting effects.

The most popular message in the dataset was Geert Wilders' opinion on the social agreement, with 332 retweets or mentions. This was his opinion and did not reference a traditional media source. Although Wilders' opinion was also mentioned in traditional media sources after this message was sent (Nederlands Dagblad, April 11, 2013; Nu.nl, April 11, 2013; Trouw, April 11, 2013), it was because of his role as a politician. The traditional media reported on what the opposition, which Wilders is a part of, thought of the agreement. The reason for Wilders making the news was not the popularity or significance of his Twitter message, but because of his role in politics.

Although Wilders would be mentioned and interviewed by the traditional media regardless of his message on Twitter, his message did become the most popular message in the dataset. The fact is that traditional media, although a very important news source, were not the only source of news regarding this topic. Messages by other politicians stood out in this dataset as well and were an important source of news during debates. Traditional media therefore did not entirely determine what the public talked about on Twitter. For this reason, Hypothesis 1: "Twitter discourse on political

subjects will be determined by traditional media sources, therefore indicating agenda-setting effects"
must be rejected.

5.2 Hypothesis 2

To test Hypothesis 2, two different cases were studied that were both politically important as
well as of public concern. These cases were Putin's visit to the Netherlands and the throne exchange
on April 30th. Starting with Putin, the most important messages during the day came from traditional
media, an author, two journalists, a radio deejay and a fake account. Apart from the fake account, all
these messages can be considered to be sent by traditional media sources. When looking at the content
of these messages, these messages are not especially newsworthy. The most popular message by
Michiel Veenstra comments on the fact that Putin mentioned pedophile club Martijn and political
party SGP. This news was already mentioned by several other people who, looking at the timeframe in
which these messages were sent, all seem to have the same news source; the press conference that was
being broadcasted live. Also, the second most popular message by Chris Klomp, and another by Gerd
de Smyter commented on Rutte's sexual orientation, which has nothing newsworthy to add to the
discussion, despite both men being journalists. It seems that people simply commented on what was
being broadcasted on TV, rather than reporting breaking news on Twitter.

Also notably, of the protests that were being held during Rutte and Putin's talk there were
hardly any traces in the dataset. Only 10 messages scattered throughout the day, come from people
that are actively protesting at that moment. Other mentions come from traditional media but never
become popular. As for Hypothesis 2, this case clearly shows strong agenda-setting effects, because
traditional media are the most important news source and single messages from citizens do not stand
out in this dataset.

The second case which Hypothesis 2 was tested with, was the throne exchange on April 30th.
When investigating the origin of the most popular messages, it becomes clear that the most popular
messages were sent by traditional media sources. The only message that should not be considered to
be traditional media, is the message from Geert Wilders, who expresses his sentiment about the day.
Further examination of the consequences that this messages had reveals that this message was not
mentioned in later news or political debate. Therefore, reversed agenda setting effects did not occur
with this message.

A traditional media message that does deserve some further attention, is the message from
Harmen van der Veen, which was the most popular message in the dataset by far. After investigating
his message, it became clear that the message made it to traditional media, as the tweet by Tina
Amirtha (@tinamirtha) in Figure 20 describes.

Figure 20: Twitter conversation between Harmen van der Veen and Tina Amirtha on May 1ˢᵗ about the message displayed in Figure 16.

Further investigation does reveal that the photo made it to the New York Times (Higgins & Cowell, 2013). Another mention was made on Mr. van der Veen's Twitter feed by Jesse Wieten (@jessewieten), that the message was posted on the website of newspaper Algemeen Dagblad. However, no traces could be found. Nevertheless, the fact that a single message became so popular that it was put on the media agenda indicates reversed agenda setting. However, the sender is a BNR News radio reporter, which makes him a traditional media source. Also, the picture was taken by a professional photographer, which means the picture that was posted in the NY Times was not copied from Twitter, but supplied by the photographer. Although it almost seemed like reversed agenda setting, the message was sent by a journalist and the photo that was posted in the NY Times was not copied from Twitter.

Looking at the steps that the examples of Kim and Lee (2007) took in their study on reversed agenda-setting, no such instances were found in this dataset. Therefore, no reversed agenda setting effects were found in this case. Apart from one message by Geert Wilders, all messages that stood out in this database were sent by traditional media sources. These traditional media messages then received much attention on from the public on Twitter and determined the discourse of the day. According to the description of Shaw and McCombs (1972) this indicates agenda-setting effects. Furthermore, because in both studies that are discussed in this section the traditional media mostly determined the discourse, the media agenda and the Twitter agenda did not differ. This is not in line with the studies by Bruns & Burgess (2011) and Maireder & Ausserhofer (2012).

Hypothesis 2 states: "A subject from a political dataset that is both highly of public and political concern, will show less agenda-setting effects than a purely political subject". It cannot be concluded that subjects that are highly of both political as public concern show less agenda setting effects than a purely political subject. The hypothesis must therefore be rejected.

5.3 Hypothesis 3

To test Hypothesis 3, the case of the King's Song was investigated. The King's Song clearly showed up in the dataset but had no direct relationship with politics. There were two single messages that stood out in the dataset. The second most popular message came from PvdD leader Marianne Thieme, who promoted a King's Song by a Dutch comedian after the official King's Song being

retracted. This message became popular and did not contain a reference to traditional media, but further investigation revealed that the message was not mentioned in later news stories or political debate.

The most popular message came from Rob Hoogland, a columnist for newspaper Telegraaf and therefore a traditional media source. His message also did not contain a reference to traditional media and was not mentioned in later news reports.

Despite the fact that the most popular messages did not have a large impact, they were part of the entire negative dataset in reference to the King's Song. As soon as the song was released, people almost collectively rejected the song and criticized it. In all the messages about the King's song that were sent on April 19th, only a handful were positive, but the general sentiment that surrounded the song was overwhelmingly negative. The criticism bothered the writer and composer of the song, John Ewbank, so much that on April 20th, only a day after its release, he retracted the song. He posted a message on his Facebook page saying that he blocked another person on Twitter because of a tasteless comment, and that was the final straw that broke the camel's back. In this message, he directly blames the many negative comments on social media for the retraction of the song. This news was then immediately taken over by the traditional media (3FM, April 21, 2013; De Jong, 2013; Haars, 2013; NOS, April 21, 2013; Oitmann, 2013; RTL Nieuws, April 20, 2013; Telegraaf April 20, 2013; Van der Heeden, 2013).

Consequently, a peak in messages was visible on April 24th. As explained in the Results chapter, this was caused by Minister of Education Jet Bussemaker, who wanted all the language errors to be corrected. The King's Song eventually became a political subject, due to the many concerns that were voiced by the public. It is therefore safe to say that the negative comments on Twitter and social media had a large impact. The comments became a trend online through different social media, and eventually caused John Ewbank to withdraw the song as the official King's song. This news, caused by comments on social media, was then spread through the traditional media channels and influenced politics. In this case the Twitter agenda was different from the media agenda. This is in line with the findings of Bruns & Burgess (2011) and Maireder & Ausserhofer (2012). Furthermore, this news item follows the same steps and develops in a similar way as the cases that Kim and Lee (2007) described in their article, and is therefore an example of reversed agenda-setting theory. This means that Hypothesis 3: "*A subject that is not related to politics will show no agenda setting effects, but strong reversed agenda setting effects*" can be confirmed.

5.4 Research Question

With the information attained from the result section, and the explanation of these results in this chapter, an answer to the research question can now be given. The following research question was formulated:

"What implications does Twitter discourse have on the applicability of the agenda setting theory and it latest variations?"

Based on the results from this study, it can be concluded that the agenda-setting theory, as well as the reversed agenda-setting theory can be applied to a political Twitter dataset. Whether traditional or reversed agenda-setting effects occur depends on the subject at hand. Subjects that are highly political are dependent on traditional media to report on the news. Journalists have privileges like access to areas and people that ordinary citizens do not have. It is therefore almost impossible for a citizen to present breaking news when traditional media is always there to report on the events as well. Traditional agenda-setting theory will hold for these subjects as it was expected in Hypothesis 1. For subjects that are of little political concern like the King's Song, the traditional media seem to have less power over the content that is being talked about. This gives much more possibilities for the citizens to be influential and opens the door for reversed agenda setting theory. The results of this study suggest that Twitter discourse shows both traditional as reversed agenda-setting effects, dependent on the subject that is being discussed.

5.5 Theoretical Implications

This study has some implications regarding the theory surrounding the agenda-setting theory. First of all, over 400 studies have been performed on the agenda-setting theory but none of those have investigated Twitter as the primary news source. There has been some research on the agenda-setting theory with regards to citizen journalism, but Twitter has, to the best of our knowledge, not yet been investigated in this regard. This study therefore contributes to the vast field of research on the agenda-setting theory, by looking at the implications that this relatively new news source has on the agenda-setting theory. This study indicates that Twitter shows strong agenda-setting effects with political subjects. This result is supported by Park (2002) who states that although the huge amount of news that is produced by net users, there is only a small fraction that actually becomes an important news story in traditional media. This indicates that journalists still have a strong role in the news environment.

This study also provides partial evidence for the conclusions of Bruns (2010), Shamma et al. (2010) and Larsson and Moe (2012), which state that spikes in Twitter activity regarding politics are mainly due to traditional media coverage. As the results showed, a large amount of important and popular messages that were sent regarding the social agreement, came from traditional media. On the other hand, this study provides new implications for the conclusions drawn by these previous studies. As explained earlier, these studies focus on political discourse as a whole. No difference is made between the subjects. This study is a first step in researching how Twitter discourse evolves regarding different political subjects. This study could only focus on three different types of subjects – solely political, both of political and public concern, and mainly of public concern – but did find indications

of large differences between subjects. Further research needs to be done to find out how discourse on other subjects evolve on Twitter.

This study provides new implications with regards to the reversed agenda setting theory. The study shows strong reversed agenda setting effects for the dataset of the King's Song. The study by Kim and Lee (2007) showed single messages that became so important that traditional media put the subject on the media agenda. This study contributes to their findings, by providing an example of a subject in which a collection of Twitter messages from citizens, instead of one single popular message, became an important trend that eventually was placed on the media agenda. This means that reversed agenda setting effects are not always due to one single message, but also appear within a collection of shared opinions.

Although this study is solely focused on Twitter data, the results of this study might also have implications for research on Facebook data. To the best of our knowledge, the agenda-setting theory has not yet been investigated with regards to Facebook data. Twitter and Facebook have a similar way in which messages can become popular very rapidly, through liking/retweeting and sharing the message with your online contacts. Also, there are many examples of single messages on Facebook that are 'liked' or 'shared' millions of times and become immensely popular, much like the most popular messages on Twitter. Therefore, based on the results of this study I expect similar results to be found with regards to the reversed and traditional agenda-setting theory, within Facebook data.

This study further has implications for research on social media trends. The results of this study give insight into the origins and developments of trends on social media with regards to different topics. Insight in trend development regarding different subjects can be important to predict upcoming trends on social media. With regards to political topics, this study provides valuable and useful information.

This study provides insight into the way people approach and discuss different topics on Twitter. The results can also be generalized to other subjects. For instance, I predict that subjects like economical news or weather reports will show strong agenda-setting effects, because of their highly media-dependent nature. Subjects that are of public concern and in which citizens witness the news themselves, like cultural events or natural disasters, will be more susceptible for reversed agenda-setting effects.

5.6 Practical implications

Besides the theoretical implications that this study provides, the results of this research also have some practical implications. This study once again shows the importance and possibilities that social media has in our society. A subject on Twitter can become so important that the traditional media puts it on their media agenda and reports on it. This provides possibilities for companies that want to promote an event, a new product or a marketing campaign. Sending the right message might spark such a trending discussion that traditional media will report on it. This is very valuable exposure

that would otherwise cost a large amount of money. If a company could master this process it would hold a valuable marketing tool and it could be a great addition to their viral marketing campaigns. How this could be implemented has to be researched further, but there are clear signs that it is possible and companies should definitely be active on Twitter and attempt to create such discussions.

For traditional news organizations, this study shows that it is important for them to keep an eye on and be active on Twitter. The results show that messages from traditional media sources are retweeted and mentioned often. This is free promotion of their website because the messages contain links to their news articles. These messages that are retweeted are seen by all the sender's followers which might also be tempted to click on the link. Being active on Twitter is therefore a good way to generate traffic to the organization's website. Also, the news corporations should keep an eye on the trending topics on Twitter to see what is on the people's minds. If an item happens to be newsworthy, it can be very beneficial to the company to be the first news source to comment on the topic.

5.7 Limitations and future research

Although some interesting findings resulted from this study, there are some limitations that need mentioning. First of all, the dataset of this study was gathered by collecting Twitter messages about specific political keywords. This resulted in a large amount of political subjects that were being discussed. This did, however, have implications for the result obtained in this study. For instance with regards to the King's Song, only those messages that were accompanied by a political keyword were obtained for this study. This means that there is a large amount of messages that do not contain political keywords, but did comment on the King's Song. Seeing the effects that were caused by the negative comments, I can only imagine that the data that was not in this dataset will only strengthen the claim that reversed agenda-setting had occurred. However, while studying the results of this thesis, one must keep in mind the fact that this was all based on a political database. This also goes for the dataset regarding Putin's visit to Holland. Protests were planned through social media but the dataset that was used in this study showed hardly any mentions of the protests.

Second, this study can only make claims about the Dutch Twitter environment. This study focused on Dutch politics and Dutch messages, which means that the results obtained in this study may not be generalized to other countries. There are immense differences in the political environments of different countries. It is not as easy to speak your mind about politics or politicians in some countries, as it is in the Netherlands. This could have a great effect on the way people use Twitter and the effect that people can have on traditional media. Also, the Twitter environment is different in every country. In Holland 3,3 million people or 19,76% of the population use Twitter, 1,6 million of them use it every day (Newcom Research & Consultancy, 2013). In the UK, 28% of the internet users are active on Twitter (Bennet, April 10, 2013), in the Unites States, the number of users is 16 % (Bennet, March 19, 2013) and in Austria, only 1% uses Twitter (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2012). Therefore, the number of users and their demographics vary per country.

In addition, the press does not enjoy the same amount of freedom anywhere in the world, as it does in the Netherlands. Journalists do not have the same rights in every country, which in turn has a big effect on what the traditional media are capable of reporting on. The same goes for the freedom of the internet. While in the Netherlands the internet is not censured at all, there are countries that limit their people's use of the internet. All these differences have implications on how citizens can affect the traditional media agenda and vice versa. This means that the results of this study can only be applied to the Netherlands.

The data used in this study can further be explored. There is a large amount of data and not all of it was used. Because of the limited time available for this thesis, the focus was on the most influential messages that stood out in the four datasets. This gives a broad picture of the discourse about these topics, but the data could contain more valuable information. By looking at every unique message and by categorizing them into groups like citizen messages and traditional media messages, more detailed results could be attained for this study. A more elaborate and detailed view can then be given of the Twitter discourse on political subjects. For this thesis, it was not feasible to categorize each single message because of the large amount of data and the limited amount of time. Future research should definitely focus on this approach.

This study shows that Twitter is an interesting new field of research for the agenda-setting theory. It is a new medium that can have massive implications for the agenda-setting theory and this study provides the first look into the possibilities of Twitter data. Further research needs to be done in this field to get a more elaborate view of what meaning Twitter can have for the agenda-setting theory, as well as the reversed agenda-setting theory. This study takes first steps, but because of the limited time I had for this research, only a broad picture is given of the possibilities of Twitter.

Also, the range of news items that have been explored in this study deserve more examination. This study examined a variety of news items which ranged from solely political to mainly public. In order to make concrete statements about these new items, each item must be further explored. I expect there to be strong agenda-setting effects in solely political news items, and more examples of reversed-agenda effects in items that are more of public concern. Future research has to determine if these expectations are true.

6. Conclusion

The agenda-setting theory has been the focus of many studies since 1972. It is considered to be still relevant to this date but has not been investigated on a large scale since the coming of new media. In the last couple of years, social media have become increasingly important in our lives. People are always connected to the internet and constantly carry the tools with them to capture newsworthy events. This can have major implications for the agenda-setting theory. A recent study around the agenda-setting theory with regards to new media resulted in what the researchers call reversed agenda-setting, and indicates that the public has quite some influence on the media agenda.

This study aims at investigating what implications the latest and most important news provision media of this moment, Twitter, has on the agenda-setting theory. The findings show that with regards to more political subjects, the public has little influence on the way the news is brought to the people. The public is limited to commenting on the messages that traditional media bring. In this regard, the agenda-setting theory holds. This study further shows that when a subject is more of a public concern and less political, the citizens have more influence on the way the item is brought to the people and how people talk about the subject. An item like this can become so important online that the traditional media eventually incorporate the item on the media agenda. With these subjects, reversed agenda-setting effects occur.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of research by providing evidence for both the agenda-setting theory and the reversed agenda-setting theory, with regards to Twitter data. Since the theories have not yet been investigated in this regard, this theory is the first to use Twitter as the primary news source.

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Appendix 1: Accounts and Keywords

Account	Subjects
vvdthesis	vvd
	rutte
	markrutte
	schippers
	#blok
	Miltenburg
	Teeven
	Hennis-plasschaert
	Zijlstra
	Weekers
	#kamp
	SchultzvanHaegen
	Schultz
	Opstelten
	#dekker
vvdpeople	@MinPres
	@EdithSchippernl
	@stefblokVVD
	@AnouchkavM
	@JeanineHennis
	@HalbeZijlstra
	@lvoOpstelten
	@SanderDekker
pvdathesis	pvda
	samsom
	klijnsma
	plasterk
	Jadnanansing
	dijsselbloem
	mariettehamer
	martijnvandam
	timmermans
	ploumen
	bussemaker
	dijksma
	mansveld
	asscher
	martinvanrijn
pvdapeople	@diederiksamsom
	@Jetta_Klijnsma
	@RPlasterk
	@tanjajad
	@J_Dijsselbloem

Account	Subjects
	@FransTimmerma
	@Jet_Bussemaker
	@sharon_dijksma
	@Min_IenM
pvvthesis	@LodewijkA
	@mjrijn
	pvv
	wilders
	@geertwilderspvv
spthesis	#sp
	roemer
	@SP
	@emileroemer
cdathesis	cda
	@sybrandbuma
	buma
	haersma
d66thesis	d66
	pechtold
	@Apechtold
cuthesis	christenunie
	#CU
	slob
	@arieslob
glthesis	groenlinks
	jolandesap
	@jolandesap
sgpthesis	SGP
	Staaij
	@keesvdstaaij
pvddthesis	pvdd
	partijvoordedieren
	partijvddieren
	thieme
	@mariannethieme
	@partijvddieren
50plusthesis	@HenkKrol
	50plus
	Krol
	@50plus_partij
extrathesis	kabinet
	ministerie
	minister

| @mariettehamer | #tweedekamer |
| @martijnvdam | #Eerstekamer |

Appendix 2: Popular Twitter messages per subject

Social Agreement

Message by Eurogroup president Jeroen Dijsselbloem about the social agreement on April 11: "Social agreement is an important breakthrough. I count on it that the agreements made have a positive effect on the economy 1/2"

Message by Prime Minister Rutte about the social agreement on April 11: "about social agreement: This is an historic agreement of trust which the Netherlands can move forward with."

Message by Second Chamber member Pieter Omtzight about the social agreement on April 12: "And the VVD still sells beautiful posters about the social afgreement (reference to VVD's webshop)".

Message by CDA council member Joost Sneller about the social agreement on April 17: " 'Social agreement abandons youth'. Strong item by CDA, D66 and CU-youth in the Volkskrant this morning".

Message by de Volkskrant about the social agreement on April 17: " 'The social agreement abandons youth', state three young presidents of D66, CDA and ChristenUnie #vkopinie"

Message by SP city council member Lilian Marijnissen about the social agreement on April 17: "Help! @diederiksamsom really blows up the social agreement: cutbacks 'for now' off the table. In August back when the economy doesn't grow!"

Message by SP city council member Lilian Marijnissen about the social agreement on April 17: "@diederiksamsom blows up the entire social agreement in his term: cutbacks probaply continue and the zero-line is now on the (healthcare)table!"

Message by SP Second chamber member Paul Ulenbelt about the social agreement on April 17:
"BREAKING. Samsom let's a bomb explode under the social agreement. He chooses for Brussels, not
for the people, employees and entrepreneurs."

Message by SP Second chamber member Paul Ulenbelt about the social agreement on April 17:
"BREAKING for Samsom the abolishment of the zero-line in healthcare is not of the web. He now
let's a second bomb explode under the social agreement."

Message by SP second chamber member Sadet Karabulut about the social agreement on April 17:
"Support from @diederiksamsom for extra cutbacks cabinet in August. This way he blows up the
social agreement #debatesocialagreement".

Putin

Message by Journalist Chris Klomp about Putin on April 8: "Live pressco Rutte and Putin. If Rutte has
a nice moment to come out of the closet… this is it!"

Message by journalist Gerd de Smyter about Putin on April 8: "The most powerful signal that #Rutte can give to #Putin, is coming out of the closet himself during dinner. #statement"

Message by fake account Koningin_NL (account name was changed to Koning_nl after the throne exchange on April 30) about Putin on April 9: "According to mister #Putin, the tolerance of 60 pedophiles and a splinterparty is just as bad as state terror. Well. #SGP"

Message by author Barry Smit about Putin on April 18: "Teeven: denying asylum application #Dolmatov was right. Well, sending a human rights activist back to Putin, what could go wrong?"

Throne Exchange

Example of traditional medium on Emotional moment Rutte. Nu.nl: "Rutte: Abdication was an emotional and special moment".

Example of traditional media o Belgium congratulating the Dutch king. Nu.nl: "Belgium congratulates new Dutch king".

Message by comedian and TV presenter Jörgen Raymann on April 30: LOL!! RT @rahielal: haha Wilders has to let all the foreigners go first".

King's Song

Example of a Retweet of a message (original message not available on Twitter) by writer Ozcan Akyol about the King's Song on April 19: "And the language errors in the King's Song had to be in there to represent PVV members.

Message by PvdD leader Marianne Thieme about the King's Song on April 19: "Still think the original version of the #kingssong is catchier"

Message by citizen Alex Ringeling about the King's Song on April 21: "So we can destroy a King's Song on Twitter, but the cabinet is still there. We're doing something wrong"

"King's Song was the opening of the NOS news. This afternoon an emergency session of the cabinet. North-Korea has not responded yet"

Example of a mention of the Nu.nl article about the King's Song on April 24: "Minister Bussemaker (education) wants language mistakes out of the King's Song"

Example of a mention of the Telegraaf article about the King's Song on April 24: "Minister Bussemaker: Language errors in kings song must be corrected. There you stand!"

Message by the Volkskrant about the King's Song on April 24: "Bussemaker wants to have the language errors to be removed out of the King's Song: Before king Willem-Alexander will be sung to Tuesday…"

Message by Elsevier magazine about the King's Song on April 24: "Minister Bussemaker wants language errors out of the King's Song"

Appendix 3: Data files

The data files that were used for the analysis of the data are enclosed digitally on the USB stick that was turned in with the thesis.