

BUILDING A MEDIA AGENDA ON HEALTH DISPARITIES:
HOW ISSUE PERCEPTIONS AND NEWS VALUES
WORK TO INFLUENCE EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

Building on prior literature conceptualizing the role of public relations in influencing the media agenda, this study proposes a model of agenda building that explores the determinants of the agenda building process and centers around the dynamics among public relations practitioners, journalists and media content. Placed in a context of racial disparities in health care, the model was tested through in-depth interviews with health care journalists and public relations practitioners on their perceptions about health disparities, and how they covered or generated coverage of the issue. Also the actual media coverage of health disparities was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The results showed initial support for the model of agenda building: the effectiveness of agenda building is positively associated with how much public relations practitioners agree with journalists on interpreting a certain issue and news values. As such, this study contributes to the theory building on agenda building by probing into the agenda building process and dynamics, and will help public relations practitioners and journalists with their efforts to build an effective media agenda beneficial to the goal of eliminating health disparities.