A scholarly article co-authored by JCOM professor Tom Terry was published late last year in the November-December 2015 edition of Military Review, the academic journal of the U. S. Army. Titled “Military Communication Strategies Based on How Audiences Meld Media and Agendas”. 

Dr. Donald Shaw, Kenan Emeritus Professor in the School of Media and Journalism of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a retired colonel in the U. S. Army, and Milad Minooie, a doctoral student at UNC-Chapel Hill, are co-authors. 

The article reviews agenda setting theory and the connection between media and public audiences with an eye to its value and challenges for military information planning. Citizens – whether in uniform or not – blend unique and often-contradictory attitudes and opinions to form their own personal agendas. This “agendamelding” affects their choice of media and how media in turn influence their perceptions of the rank ordering and importance of particular issues. 

Shaw, Terry, and Minooie believe that social media has democratized the news and with profound and under-realized implications for the military. They point out there are vast differences in media use by senior officers compared to junior officers and enlisted personnel. Nearly 560,000 officers and enlisted personnel are 25 years old or younger, while only about 63,000 are 41 and older. The authors recommend senior military leaders incorporate the media platforms their audiences and soldiers prefer when devising information strategies. 

The three scholars designed an intriguing Agenda Community Attraction (ACA) formula to explain the informational and experiential knowledge that creates the agenda or opinion structure for individuals, organizations, and/or countries. Applying the formula, they found that the traditional vertical media appealing most broadly to all layers of society (such as the main networks and the New York Times, among others) still guide the nation’s agenda despite the explosion in social media. The traditional media infiltrate niche publications and social media and their impact is then significantly magnified.