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Readings in Media and Communication Studies

Edited by

**Adesina Lukuman Azeez
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Theorising Mass Communication, Media and Cultural Studies

Lambe Kayode Mustapha

Objectives

At the end of this chapter, students are expected to:

1. Understand the background of various theories of mass communication.
2. Explain basic ideas and theses of different theories of mass communication.
3. Describe the mechanism by which each of the theories interface with social, cultural, political and economic circumstances of the society.

Introduction

DeFleur (2010, p. 18) defines a theory as “a description of how something works”. While theories have been employed to unpack the unknown in all fields, the concerns of theories in mass communication and mass media studies include descriptions of the origins, processes, and effects of mass communication for individuals and the society (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). Ability to theorise about the relationships among concepts that exist in reality was the basis for establishing enduring scholastic culture and community across different fields of human endeavours. Although, mass communication is a relatively young field of scholarship (McQuail, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009), it benefits tremendously from the works of intellectual sojourners, from established fields like psychology, sociology, rhetoric, political science, among others, who were using their scholarly prisms to explicate the microscopic and macroscopic effects of the new technologies for information dissemination on heterogeneous and amorphous audience (Baran & Davis, 2012; Sparks, 2010). Beyond offering descriptions of and relationships among concepts, theories help us to understand and explain observable real world phenomena, guide research and help solve practical problems (DeFleur, 2010; Littlejohn, 2002; Miller, 2005).

Mass communication theories evolved in tandem with advances in information and communication technologies and explained the potency of the differential technologies for individuals and societal cognition of real world happenings, perceptions being held about the world as well as affect, opinion formation, and observable behaviours about the vast external world. According to Baran and Davis (2012), theoretical development in mass communication is a product of five eras of mass communication research- mass society, social scientific/empirical, limited-effects, critical and cultural studies and moderate effects paradigm. Other scholars offered alternative explanations on the trajectories of theoretical evolution in mass communication (DeFleur, 2010; McQuail, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Sparks, 2010). The vastness of the field as well as multiplicity of its theorisation would undoubtedly limit discussion in this chapter to key theoretical paradigms with apt and succinct characterisation of theories in each of the paradigms to be discussed in the subsequent sections. Needless to say that this chapter cannot exhaustively cover the entire theories that underpin mass communication and mass media studies, given their number as well as transitory nature of the media landscape that precipitates emergence of new theories in evolutionary ways. However, attempt has been made to catalogue key theories that are not only tested and trusted, but remain relevant and enduring despite the fleeting nature of social, cultural, political, economic and technological circumstances impinging on the mass media system.

Era of Mass Communication Theory

This section partitions explication of various theories of mass communication according to the socio-technological as well as political circumstances that underpinned their evolution and development. Specifically, the section offers synoptic appraisals of theories that developed along the same schools of thought as well as in tandem with paradigmatic revolution in theorising mass communication.

The Mass Society Era

The dominant perspective on media and society in the latter half of the nineteenth century precipitated by industrialisation-induced massive rural-urban migration. Characterised by powerful printing presses and increasing population of readers, the era led to both optimistic and pessimistic perspectives. Situating the mass media at the centre of ruptured social order, the pessimists criticised and accused the media of promoting popular culture responsible for political unrest and subversion of important cultural norms (Baran & Davis, 2012). In his own description of mass society, DeFleur (2010, p. 83) opines that it was a transition from traditional, interpersonal society to urban-industrial society “characterised by anonymity, a loss of strong informal rules of behavior, increasing social pathologies, lonely existence in a sea of people, and greatly reduced channels of interpersonal communication”.

Mass society is the general notion that held the mass media accountable for the ills witnessed by Western industrial society and conferred on the media the power to esoterically shape audience's perceptions of the social reality and unconsciously manipulate their actions in a direct, immediate, powerful and uniform ways. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries when mass society theory held sway, the general belief was that the mass media (newspapers, radio, movies) were going to destroy the moral standards of the society through creation of social pathologies such as crime, rape and socio-political upheavals. A product of series of media-induced microscopic and macroscopic change in the society, mass society notion was bolstered by results of Payne Studies, World Wars propaganda and Cantril's analysis of the radio joke *The Invasion from Mars*. Precisely, Lowery and DeFleur (1995) concluded that earliest systemic investigation of media effects dubbed Payne Study offered significant findings that supported the notion that characterised the mass media as dangerous, fear mongering and capable of upsetting and perverting the normative social order of the period (Spark, 2010). In a more fearful conception of what mass media meant in the mass society era, O'Sullivan, Hartley Saunders and Fiske (1989, p. 132) surmise that “any time you speculate on what ‘effect’ the media have on people, especially if your thoughts turn to

notions such as dependency, aggression, narcotization, brutalization, and desensitization, then you are thinking mass society theory”.

Using various dichotomous comparison of traditional/rural and modern/urban settings scholars documented the role of the mass media in institutionalisation of fear factor. While Ferdinand Tönnies, for instance, conceptualised the development as *Gemeinschaft* (folk communities where people were bonded based on strong family ties, cultural tradition, and rigid assigned roles in the societal institutions) and *Gesellschaft* (industrial society, where people engaged each other in relatively weak social institutions based on choices considered as rational and formal and with little expectations of support from others), Émile Durkheim used mechanical solidarity (folk communities like machines bounded together to perform social roles like cogs of a machine) and organic solidarity (which likened modern society to animal whose cells perform specialised tasks that depend on the overall health and survival of the society (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010).

Without formal naming and hypothetical testing, magic bullet theory and hypodermic needle theory emerged as apt explanation of what media did to the audience in the mass society era, where media message was considered to be act as magic bullet or a form of injection that triggers reaction once it reaches the audience (Schiller, 1996; Spark, 2010). Magic Bullet Theory, in essence, is the belief that mass media message will reach every eye and ear, with immediate and powerful effect which shape thoughts and conduct of the receivers. Metaphorically, media messages were seen as ‘bullet’ capable of percing audience consciousness and altering their beliefs and actions (DeFleur, 2010).

Limited Effects Era

Limited-effects theory open the floodgate into scientific perspective on mass communication research and consists of a number of smaller theories that believe in limited microscopic and macroscopic role of the media. Challenging the mass society notion, limited-effect theories explicate short-term effects of routine media usage. The perspective avers that rather than melding the members of the public into holding monolithic perception and attitude or causing automatic behaviour, the effects of

media messages are mitigated by friends, family, the religion, etc. (Curran, 2002; Schiller, 1996; Spark, 2010).

Limited-effects perspective was championed by methodologists rather than theorists- those who believed in the use of scientific methods to probe the acclaimed powerful effects of the media. Prominent in this perspective were names like Harold Lasswell, Paul Lazarsfeld, Carl Hovland, Bernard Berelson, Hadley Cantril, Hazel Gaudet, among others. Through new research methods such as survey and experiment, these scholars were able to employ systematic and objective methods of science to account for effects of media. Their findings revealed minimal, if any, effect contrary to the beliefs of mass society perspective. From Universities of Columbia and Yale, where Lazarsfeld and Hovland held sway, respectively, scholarship in mass communication, particularly along the use of scientific methods and within limited-effects paradigm blossomed (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010).

Using inductive approach, Lazarsfeld et al. belief that theorisation about the social world should base on empirical observation rather than via mere speculations. This approach led to development of middle range theories that were based on empirical facts rather than grand assumptions (Baran & Davis, 2012). A number of theories that emerged from this development changed the perspective about all-powerful media fueled by the notion of vertical control (Curran, 2002, p. 132).

Chiefly and by far the most popular theory that emerged from the limited-effects perspective was Two-step Flow Theory, which emerged from the findings of the study of the 1940 U.S presidential election, popularly called Erie County Study, which documented minimal effect of candidates' radio message on the eventual choice by the voters (Curran, 2002; Schiller, 1996; Spark, 2010). Published as *The People's Choice*, the results of the study showed that a group of the voters who used the mass media minimally relied on heavy users and politically-sophisticated voters to make final decision about the ballot. The opinion leaders as the latter were called advise the former (opinion followers). Further studies (The Rovere Study, The Decatur Study and The Drug Study) were conducted

by Lazarsfeld and his colleagues to affirm and consolidate the findings of the original Two-step Flow study published as *The People's Choice*.

In another influential work, conducted by Carl Hovland and his colleagues at the Yale University on effects of war movies and published as *Experiment on Mass Communication*, the results reinforced the finding of *The People's Choice* as the effects of war films produced ceiling effect, showing the level of motivation of the soldiers did not increase to those envisaged by believers of all-powerful media effects (Spark, 2010). Other theories that emerged from the limited-effects perspective to theorising media effects include individual differences theory, resulting from series of experiments on how differential personality characteristics mediate/moderate the effects of media message on the audience. Individual differences is a perspective that holds that individuals have differing personal psychological attributes in the same way that they have differential biological endowments. Baran and Davis (2012) refer to individual differences as peculiar personality features that can potentiate or attenuate media influence in certain individuals. Because attitudes, beliefs and values evolved from context of experience, people cognition and perception will differ in tandem with their experience. In addition, social category theory is also a product of limited-effects perspective that assumed uniformity of response to media messages by individuals of a given social category. It holds that individual with similar characteristics (sex, socio-economic status, religious affiliation, age, etc.) are likely to seek similar media messages and respond to the same in a similar way (Baran & Davis, 2012; Folari, 2005).

In addition, a theory based on based on cognitive consistency- a defence mechanism that help preserve personally held values and beliefs via avoidance of inconsistent messages and called selectivity theory also evolved. The theory assumed that individual could self-preserve through mechanisms of selective exposure, which holds that people seek information that is in congruent with their previous and strongly held beliefs, interests and boost their ego while avoiding contrary ones; selective retention- believes that people remember best and for longer time messages that are deeply meaningful to them; and selective perception- psychological remembrance of communication messages in the light of

previously held dispositions, beliefs and attitudes (Baran & Davis, 2012; Spark, 2010).

In the contemporary time, a number of perspectives have also emerged from limited-effects paradigm, consisting of beliefs that even when media effects were seen to be minimal, people learn information from the media. Theories in this category include information-flow theory (information/news diffusion theory), which assume importance of the word-of-mouth in the diffusion of news, given people's apathy to hard news; Joseph Klapper's phenomenistic/reinforcement theory- a notion that media reinforce existing views, based on psycho-sociological factors (socio-economic status, group affiliation, level of education, etc.), rather than change people's attitude; and V. O. Key's elite pluralism theory, which factors in equal status and representation of divergent social, cultural and political groups in the society whose leadership mitigate the influence of media on the group members (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009).

The Alternative Paradigms: Critical and Cultural Studies

This perspective was rooted in non-empirical approach to unpacking the role of communication in the creation and maintenance of culture and society. Specifically, critical and cultural studies, according to Baran and Davis (2012, p. 210) answer "questions about the way media might produce profound changes in social life through their subtle influence on the myriad of social practices that form the foundation of everyday life." The major belief of this alternative paradigm to theorising about mass communication is that knowledge is power and mass media are being used to legitimise the ideas of the powerful groups in the society through construction of reality, representation of culture and normalisation of values (Baran & Davis, 2012; Croteau & Hoynes, 2000; DeFleur, 2010; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). Citing Garnham (1995), Baran and Davis (2012, p. 211) dichotomise scholarship in alternative perspectives. According to these scholars, microscopic interpretive theories, collectively referred to as cultural theory, address the use of the media to create and promote culture suitable to everyday life of individuals and small groups,

while the macroscopic structural theories deal with the integration of media institution into capitalist economies.

Mainly, this approach has two major variants- critical theory and cultural studies theory. According to Rosenberry and Vicker (2009) critical theorists believe that the quantitative measurement of extant communication circumstances reinforces status quo rather than advocating actions that could help the marginalised overcome domination they are facing. In their views, ideology, the dominant view of how society should be organised and ran, and hegemony, the use of the ideology by the elite to maintain control over the vast majority, are two major concepts that concerned scholars seeking reforms through critical theorisation of the roles of the media in the society. While the Marxian critical theory, based on Karl Marx ideology of bourgeoisie-proletariat exploitative relations, believes that the mass media are central to creation of false consciousness that support capitalistic exploitation, the political economy variant of critical theory examines "how the forces within a society help to determine how its economic and social systems operate together" (Rosenberry & Vicker, p. 179). In essence, various forms of organising and financing media organisations have traceably consequences for range of content, representation in and access to the media (Golding & Murdock, 1991; Herman & Chomsky, 2002; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). This makes media content to reinforce the status quo always.

In *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, Herman and Chosky (2002) offer a critical-model of how the elite controls the content of the media through what they described as the five-filters that determine information that is fit for public consumption. The filters include ownership and business orientation, which is capitalistic; advertisers, who underwrite media operation and thus enjoy favourable coverage; sources, mainly political and corporate elites interested in sustaining the status quo; flak, stringent opposition to inconvenient mediated information through subtle threats and censorship, and anti-communist ideology (now ideological control), used by political and economic elites to create dominant us-versus-them ideology used in currying public support (see also Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009, p. 181).

Cultural studies theory, on the other hand, is less radical and considered using interpretive methodologies to examining culture and society. Under the leadership of Stuart Hall, scholars at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham believed that there are several ideologies in a given society, each seeking dominant position and using symbolic communication to marginalise alternative conception of reality. Predominantly, cultural studies places emphasis on interpretive paradigm and textual analysis to understanding communication texts; uses Stuart Hall's encoding-decoding model of media discourse to explicate intended and actual meaning taken from communication texts; and assumes that while media producers offer preferred reading, audience may accept the dominant reading, engage in negotiated decoding and develop oppositional decoding (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Thussu, 2006).

Other variants of critical/cultural studies theories identified by Baran and Davis (2012) include symbolic interactionism, which assumes that people are responsible for creating their social world through symbolic communication; technological determinism, the McLuhan's explanation for how technology influences human thought about and action towards the external world; McLuhanism and global village as well as media ecology theory, which were all associated with influential thought of Marshall McLuhan's notions on how communication technology will affect societal organisation and interactions. Other theories in alternative paradigms are postmodernism, postcolonialism, feminism, etc (see Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009).

Normative Theory

Normative theories of the press are concerned with expected obligations of the press- what the press owe the society. These theories are basically different from other communication theories because they they focused ownership and control through explication of the relationship between the press and political system rather than offering prediction or explanation about relationship between the press and the audience. Normative theories were first proposed in 1956 by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm in their book called *Four Theories of the Press*. Other

variants were contributed by Dennis McQuail (2010) as well as Baran and Davis (2012).

The Four Theories of the Press, published the earliest forms of normative theories, explicated the features of the relationship between political and media systems of certain milieus. These theories explained differential roles and operations of the press in different countries. Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956, pp. 1-2) argued that “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted”. Normative theories include the four theories, namely authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist as well as additional two others-development and democratic participant theories.

Authoritarian theory is oldest of the normative theories that describes absolutistic media-societal role of 16th century Europe and presupposed that the existence of the press was on royal authority. Assumed that the press function as conveyors of what the rulers wanted the people to know (Merrill, 1991). Being an instrument of power, ruler control press via licensing and censorship. Authoritarian regimes employ repressive legislations, heavy taxation, direct or subtle state control of staffing, rationing of news print, censorship, suspension of publication and proscription to trigger the press to proactively advance state's totalising control over the society. (Folarin, 2005; McQuail, 2010; Severin & Tankard, 2010).

Libertarian Theory emerged in opposition to authoritarian theory and premised on the rationality of citizens to distinguish truth from falsehood (Baran & Davis, 2012). It assumed that media should independently help citizens to search for the truth by being the public sphere, open marketplace of idea and societal watchdog. A product of 16th century libertarian thoughts that promoted individuals' freedom of thought in response to protestant reformation, libertarianism benefited tremendously from the work of John Milton's *Areopagetica* (self-righting process of the free marketplace of idea) and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (Merrill, 1991; Severin & Tankard, 2010). Libertarianism was further promoted following

the American Revolution, the First Amendment and pontifical pronouncement on the preference for the press over government by the third U.S president, Thomas Jefferson (Baran & Davis, 2012; Severin & Tankard, 2010). At some point, this theory, however, wavered due to notable irresponsibility that threatened the notion of free press. Libertarian press theory was later remodified with the birth of social responsibility theory.

Social Responsibility Theory was developed in response to the danger posed on freedom of the press because of increasingly monopolistic conditions and elite domination of the media under libertarian paradigm. It was premised on the notion that media should accept a greater responsibility to the society. The theory emerged as a product of "the Hutchin's Commission on the Freedom of Press", sponsored by Henry Luce, CEO of Time Inc. Rather than controlling the media via direct institutional mechanism, social responsibility theory tasks media professionals to redouble their efforts to serve the public rather than being instruments of the elite class (DeFleur, 2010; Severin & Tankard, 2010). The most interesting feature of social responsibility theory innovatively called on the media to take the responsibility of creating productive and creative "Great Communities" of pluralistic groups thus serving as the voice of all the people rather than voice of the members of the elite class (Baran & Davis, 2012).

Soviet Communist Theory: An offshoot of authoritarian theory, Soviet Communist theory explained how the Soviet Communist press was owned by and served the ruling party in order to accomplish certain changes (Folarin, 2005). Soviet Communist theory prioritised cultivation of a homogeneous national culture. Based on Marxist ideology, Soviet Communism theory believed that government should undertake total controls of the media and communication in the interest of and for the benefit of working classes. This theory clamoured for termination of private media ownership and advocated absolute state control of the press (Folarin, 2005; Merrill, 1991; Severin & Tankard, 2010). Through provision of information, education and entertainment to the working class, Soviet Communist theory believed that great thoughts emanating from the media strongly socialised the society. In addition to the four

theories of the press, McQuail (2010) quipped that there is the need to examine media-political systems relations as a result of changing conditions of many nations and fluidity of ensuing political system. Hence, democratic-participant theory and development media theory emerged as additional normative theories.

Democratic-Participant Media Theory, as proposed by McQuail (1983), called on the media to promote active political involvement of the citizens. The theory emphasises communicative practices that promote opinion expression, self-empowerment and popular inclusion. Through these principles, citizens' access to the media can be best guaranteed. A theory that emerged to correct disillusionment caused by libertarian and social responsibility theories, democratic-participant theory calls for pluralism of the media and localisation, rather than centralisation, of the media and horizontal rather than vertical societal communication system in order to facilitate grassroots democracy (Folarin, 2005). Democratic-participant theory believed that grassroots involvement could be best promoted via small-scale, segmented, commercial and non-profit media.

Development Media Theory, an authoritarianism for a good cause, emanated from foreign development projects of western communication scholarship. The theory advocates media support for the political, economic and socio-cultural development and emancipation of poor society (McQuail, 1983). Development media theory preaches that the media should maintain complementary rather than antagonistic posture to the ruling regime. McQuail (1987), cited in Folarin (2005, pp. 45-46) offered the following tenets of developmental media theory: (1) media should align their tasks with nationally established development policy (2) press freedom should prioritise societal economic and development needs of the people (3) national language and culture should be prioritised by the media; (4) priority should be given to information concerning developing countries with closer geographic, political and cultural affinity; (5) media workers should be free and responsible in their information gathering and dissemination roles, and (6) towards development ends state is empowered to regulate media operation via censorship, subsidy and direct control.

Individual Perspective on Theorising Mass Communication

Developed within the psychological approach to understanding effects of communication, the individual perspective introduces theories that focused on the individual relationship with the mass media. Individual perspective is rooted in active audience paradigm, a belief that opposed the view that members of the audience are homogeneous group of message receivers who are affected the same way by media messages. Theories under individual perspective include, but not limited to, Uses and Gratifications, Social Learning, Schema and Information Processing, Third Person Effect, and Source Credibility Theory. Each of these is discussed in turn below.

Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory: Developed by Elihu Katz and his colleagues in 1959 in response to Bernard Berelson denigration of research and theory development in the field of mass communication. U & G moves mass communication research away from persuasion-oriented effects, debunked by limited-effects theorists. Rather than exploring “what the media do to the audience”, U & G Theory asks the question: “what do people do with the media” (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Spark, 2010). From initial findings that housewives listening to radio soap opera were motivated by three basic reasons (emotional release, opportunities for wishful thinking, and obtaining advice), Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1974) enhanced the theoretical rigour of U & G Theory through explication of how gratifications sought become motives for using a specific medium or a specific content. According to these scholars, audience members are goal-oriented and thus are active in their media use. This means that individuals actively seek out media content that provide them with personal satisfaction. Audience’s media choice is, therefore, linked to need gratification. To ground the theory as an alternative paradigm to limited-effects perspective, five specific needs were identified as drivers of audience motives for seeking media gratifications (Katz, Gurevitch & Hass, 1973):

- Cognitive Need: Need to strengthen information, knowledge and understanding.

- Affective Need: Need to strengthen aesthetic, pleasurable or emotional experience.
- Personal Integrative Need: Need to strengthen confidence, credibility, status, etc.
- Social Integrative Need: Need to strengthen contact with family, friends and the world.
- Escape Need: Release from tension, unwinding and recreate oneself.

Besides the original studies, several scholars have adapted the U & G theoretical formulation to explicate why certain media or programmes are preferred over others. The theory has also been used explore differential reasons for being attracted to a particular medium and not the others. U & G theory has shown tremendous heuristic value that keeps adapting to the fluidity of media landscape, forms and formats.

Social Learning Theory: Also referred to as Social Cognitive Theory or Modelling Theory. Social Learning Theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1960s to explain how individuals, being imitative creatures, learn how to do things and what not to do by watching and copying other people's behaviours (Baran & Davis, 2012); DeFleur, 2010). Bandura observed that the mass media offer opportunity to learn social cues and ability to teach people in many ways through observation, imitation, inhibition, identification and disinhibition (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009; Spark, 2010).

- Observation: Learning to do things after seeing them in the media
- Imitation: The direct reproduction of observed behaviour
- Identification: Effort to be like or having qualities or characteristics of media-observed model.
- Inhibition: Avoiding media-watched behaviours that resulted in negative consequences.
- Disinhibition: Ability to handle fearful circumstance due to knowledge of how such circumstance has been handled in the media.

Schema/Information Processing Theory: Developed by Axelrod and Graber and posits that individual tries to interpret new information based on the way s/he has always interpret information about the same situation. Using schema, a prenotion or assumption about organisation of the external world, information processing theory believes that individual looks for quick heuristics to decode information (Baran & Davis, 2012). Because people are always overwhelmed by too much information that they cannot handle, they need processing mechanisms to help pull out the information they need the most (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). Therefore, cues such as headline, pictures and graphics that accompany news story link it to a particular schema.

Third-Person Effect Theory: Advanced by Phillips Davison (1983) through a series of small studies, Third-person effect explains how many individuals believe that they are personally immune to any negative influence of the mass media while believing that other people who are exposed to the same content are not immune and can be influenced. Accordingly, Third-person Effect Theory holds that members of the public normatively believe being influence by media content signifies not being smart (Davison, 1983; Lambe & McLeod, 2005). Hence, members of the audience assume they are 'smarter' than others, especially those who are not similar to themselves or those with less status. A lot of the strengths of the Third-person Effect Theory comes from messages that are seen to be negative or socially undesirable (pornography, obscenity, the use of anti-social language in the media, etc.), while members of the audience report a First-person perception and effects when the messages are positive and desirable (Reid, Byrne, Brundidge, Shoham & Marlow, 2007).

Source Credibility Theory: Developed through differential works of Sherif and Hovland (1961), Source Credibility Theory contends that individuals learn a great deal of social norms from the mass media as much as they learn from social groups (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). Hence, message that originate from a source that is judged as credible will be highly perceived by and persuasive to members of the audience (Belch & Belch, 2012). A clear illustration of Source Credibility Theory can be found in celebrity endorsement (Aljasir, 2019). Source Credibility theory emphasises the need to consider what the audience already believe. Based

on three characteristics of knowledge, trustworthiness, and charisma, credible sources are judged to be believable by members of the audience. Understanding the components of source credibility helps media practitioners to craft the most persuasive messages while recognising that they cannot persuade all the people all the time with a single message. Scholars have added other dimensions, such as attractiveness, dependability, believability, among others to indicators used in instantiating perceived credibility of sources of mediated messages.

Media System Dependency Theory: Developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFluer (1976) to explicate the relationship among the social system, the media system and the audience and how each of these interacts and affects one another. MSD theory also focuses on how dependent individuals are on the media to understand media effects. It holds that increased dependency on media to gratifies one need enhances the importance and influence of media role in one's life. (Baran & Davis, 2012; Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). The key focus of MSD theory is that the more people become dependent upon a medium, the more they will find it influential in their lives. Hence, media dependency and media effects are inextricably linked. Dependency on the media occurs because of increasing complexity of the society. Media dependency increases during period of turmoil with members of the public turning to the media to help resolve the uncertainty surrounding catastrophic events (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009).

Sociological Perspective on Mass Communication Theory

The sociological perspective on mass communication theory deals with mass media theories that explicate the societal influence of the media. Theories in this perspective explain the role of media in the social world. Given the sea of information that the audience contends with on daily basis, theories in this perspective help provide understanding on how media usage of members of the audience determine what they are and what they can be. "Our use of information does much to determine who we are, and the way most people use information does much to shape the society we live in" (Baran & Davis, 2012, p. 279). Most of the theories in this tradition are grounded in empirical research and offer both optimistic

and pessimistic view of the role of the media, although not in poisonous manner of the mass society theory. Theories in the sociological approach to mass communication effects include Agenda-setting Theory, Diffusion Theory, Spiral of Silence Theory, Knowledge-gap Hypothesis, Cultivation Theory, Media Intrusion Theory, etc.

Agenda-Setting Theory: Developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) from earlier submissions of Walter Lippmann (1922) in *Public Opinion* and Bernard Cohen's statement in *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Baran & Davis, 2012; Mustapha & Wok, 2015a). The theory posits that through selection and emphasis the mass media transfer salience of issues from the media agenda to the public agenda. The theory, which began from a seminal study (Chapel Hill Study) that documented a near perfect correlation between issues covered in the media serving Chapel Hill, North Carolina's voters and perceptions of the most important issues among Chapel Hill voters during the 1968 U.S presidential election, has proved to be one of the most heuristic theory of mass communication (Mustapha, 2012; Mustapha & Work, 2015b) with seven dimensions (issues or first-level, attribute or second-level, agenda-building, intermedia agenda-setting, consequence of agenda-setting, agenda-melding and network agenda-setting).

Agenda-setting occurs through news placement and attention, which communicate some issues as being more important and newsworthy than the others. In the newspapers, for instance, issues that are discussed in the front page, with big font headlines are consider important than those in other sections. Similarly, the earliest news on the broadcast newscast would be deemed important than the ones broadcast later in the news. In essence "the agenda set by the news media is said to be a major influence on the beliefs of the audience about the hierarchy of importance of issues and topics reported by the press" (DeFleur, 2010, p. 160). It is assumed that those issues that are reported in a prominent manner in the media will be considered important by the audience while those issues that are less prominent in the media will be seen as less important.

Diffusion Theory: Explains the pattern that emerged from how members of a society accept something new. Initially connected with Ryan and

Gross' (1943) study of diffusion of hybrid corn among Iowa corn farmers, Diffusion of Innovation theory is much associated with Everett Rogers (1962). The theory examines how media and interpersonal channels differ in distribution of news about an innovative idea. When the people of a society take up and incorporate into their way of life some news idea, belief, word, tool, or other solution to a problem, their culture undergoes change. Rogers argued that new innovation pass through stages before they are finally adopted (awareness of the innovation, acceptance of innovation by innovators/early adopters, adoption of innovation by opinion leaders from early adopters, encouragement of opinion followers to adopt the innovation and, finally, adoption of the innovation by a group of laggards or late adopters).

While diffusion of technology is one of the way diffusion theory can be applied, theorists have also apply it to how news is diffused through society. According to Rogers (2004), diffusion of news theory was a collection of empirical findings by Paul J. Deutschmann and Wayne Danielson (1960). "A common finding in the news event diffusion studies was that the media, especially the broadcast media, were particularly important in spreading major news events" (Rogers, 2004, p. 12). The theory asserts that except for interpersonal reinforcement of news, hardly would majority of the population get to know happenings around them via news. Findings also showed that irrespective of the sources, significant news events concerning substantial number of people spread faster and wider.

Spiral of Silence Theory: Spiral of silence is the notion that people with contrary viewpoint keep the view to themselves to avert rejection in the face of dominant majority viewpoint. Formulated by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1973), spiral of silence occurs when the minority keeps silent in an atmosphere of dominant majority opinion expression, making majority opinion seems more dominant and minority opinion seems out of the mainstream. Spiral of silence, therefore, examines how public opinion is formed by a process in which individuals try to determine whether their opinions are in the majority (a process that involves the media because the media offer the means to establish prevailing public opinion). Noelle-Neumann argued that spiral of silence represents a powerful media effects

which happen because media are virtually everywhere (ubiquity), repeat stories and perspectives (cumulation) and accommodate journalistic values (consonance) (Rosenberry & Vicker, 2009). Spiral of silence have been applied to political issues, policy issues, etc.

Knowledge-Gap Hypothesis: Emerged from the findings of how the use of media and technology play a central role in the society. Associated with Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) who conducted series of research at the University of Minnesota to establish how increased infusion of media information into the society enhances faster information acquisition of members of higher socio-economic class than the lower segment leading to increase in the gap of knowledge between the two groups. The team, according to Baran and Davis (2012, p. 292), believes that:

news media systematically inform some segments of the population, specifically persons in higher socioeconomic groups, better than others. Over time, the differences between the better-informed and the less-informed segments tend to grow- the knowledge gap between them gets larger and larger.

According to Rosenberry and Vicker (2009, pp. 159-160), Tichenor et al. argued that the gap in knowledge grows because of the following reasons:

- A. Higher level of communication skill: Higher socioeconomic group tends to be better educated thus easing their reading and comprehension of materials.
- B. A greater amount of stored information: Existing and accumulated information helps the better educated act more capably on new information.
- C. Relevant social contacts: Higher status group know a lot of people they can contact for more advice on issues.
- D. Selective Exposure: The lower the socioeconomic status the lower the acceptance and retention of media message.

E. The nature of mass media system: Mass media aimed at a higher education level

Cultivation Theory: Developed by George Gerbner and his colleagues at Annenberg School of Communication, University of Pennsylvania, through profiling of violence in the television and projecting how televisual violence affects the society. Through Cultural Indicator Project, consisting of message system analysis (monitoring of violence on prime time television) and cultivation analysis (investigation of viewer conception of social reality based on exposure to television), scholars offered that heavy viewing of television led to cultivation of a common view of the world (Baran & Davis, 2012; DeFleur, 2010, Ronseberry & Vicker, 2009). Thus, heavy viewing of televisual violence leads to conception of a mean world. Gerbner et al. identified two processes the help explicate differential cultivation among viewers of televisual violence (Baran & Davis, 2012; Folarin, 2005; Spark, 2010):

A. Mainstreaming: Commonality of outlook resulting from television exposure among people of different social groups. Television remains common factor that bring people of different background and experience together and overrides differences among individuals.

B. Resonance: Describes the greater impact of certain images on people whose real-life situation mirrors that of what happens in the media. When there is consonance between what people see on television and everyday reality, the interaction results into a coherent and powerful 'double dose'. The congruence of television world and real life circumstance resonates and amplifies cultivation effect.

Media Intrusion Theory: Propagated by Davison (1990) to explain how the mass media have taken the centre stage in societal communication to the disadvantage of other activities that help build the community. Baran and Davis (2012) hold that media intrusion theory is the notion that intrusion of the mass media has taken over and subverted politics, to the extent that people stay home to consume media content a lot compare to their participation in local public groups. The intrusion of the media into

societal community-building efforts has resulted into weakened social capital and attendant political apathy. This explains the decline in the power of political party to mobilise grassroots support and the attendant superiority of the media, particularly television and of late social media, as the greatest interface between political actors and the voters.

Framing Theory: Began from sociologist Erving Goffman's idea about how people use expectations to make sense of everyday life. Framing theory refers to the way events and issues are organised and made sense of, especially by media, media professionals and their audiences. While framing analysis has a wide societal appeal, its use in explaining media effects has been promoted by many scholars with Robert Entman being a leading light (Baran & Davis, 2012; Severin & Tankard, 2010). According to Entman (1993), "to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation of the item described". Severin and Tankard (2010) also submit that "frame is a central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration." Frame, in essence, help the audience to make meaning of media content within a particular context and worldview. "The most common finding is that exposure to news coverage results in learning that is consistent with the frames that structure the coverage" (Baran & Davis, 2012, p. 338).

Operational Theories

The operational or working theories of mass communication provide explanations on routine activities that grounded mass communication works, from news production to other mass communication product (book, film, etc.). According to Folarin (2005), working theories consist of consistent rules, values, customs, traditions, etc. guiding the media production process. McQuail (2010, p. 259) provides the most apt summarisation of how operational theory evolved in mass communication by positing that:

All phases of media production involve a large volume of work that becomes routinized as a matter of necessity. The regularities of behaviour and thinking that result from these routines give rise to empirical generalizations and to the possibility of theorizing about what is going on.

Theories in this perspective include Gatekeeping Theory, Media Logic Model, Media Influence Model, etc.

Gatekeeping Theory: The metaphor of 'gate' and 'gatekeeping' to describe the selection and screening process that takes place in everyday newsroom originated from empirical study conducted by Kurt Lewin during the World War II. Kurt Lewin was commissioned to study the process by which a typical American family selects the foods that they prepared and consumed at home at a point when their common foods were in short supply (DeFleur, 2010; Shoemaker, 1991). Through a series of experiments, Lewin discovered the process by which foods were selected through selection of some and rejection of others based on price, availability and perceived desirability. The use of criteria in selecting food means that certain area within the channel function as a 'gate'.

David Manning White (1949) apply the gatekeeping metaphor to the process of news selection by understanding the psychology of gatekeepers and found that there were numerous gatekeepers (Shoemaker, 1991; Baran & Davis, 2012). "Mr Gate" as White called the editor used some subjective value judgment in selecting some news as fit for publication: non-sensational, well-written, non-propagandistic, less figures and statistics, fresh angle, good taste, etc. (Dainton & Zelley, 2005; Shoemaker, 1991). The utility of gatekeeping becomes apparent given the fact that news perspective exists in all news organisation. Besides, limited space, time, and human capacity to grapple with a plethora of events attracting news coverage on daily basis require that a lot of news gathered on daily basis need to be screened and selected appropriately (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders & Fiske, 1989). Contemporary values such as impact, proximity, timeliness, prominence, conflict, bizarre, etc. now function as gatekeeping criteria (Folarin, 2005).

Media Logic Model: Media seek to attract audience through a form of representation that is standardised and appealing. Media logic model implies the application of cultural standardisation to the processing of media raw materials. Hence, all types of media content must conform to standardised formats that are rooted in traditions. The media logic model is associated with Altheide and Snow (1979) who submitted that a giving content of the media should systematically fit some pre-existing definitions. According to McQuail (2010, p. 279) "The operation of a media logic implies the existence of a 'media grammar' which governs how time should be used, how items of content should be sequenced and what devices of verbal and non-verbal content should be used". Media logic works based on the increased centrality of mass media to other institutions, that requires these institutions to conduct their affairs in a way that is appealing to media routine of coverage. Staging event or pseudo-event is an instance of fitting into the media logic since this increase audience attention and satisfaction thus offering publicity. Key characterisation of media logic include immediacy, brevity, dramatization, conflict, celebrity-centredness, personalisation, and high tempo, among others.

Media Influence Model: Rather than reflecting reality, the mass media re-present reality. The mass media do not simply mirror the social world. Mass media content is shaped, pounded, constrained, and encouraged by a multitude of forces (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Shoemaker, 1991). Sometimes there is a correspondence between presentation and observed reality while there could be divergence between the two worlds (media and real). It is also possible to have similar version of the same event being presented by two media as much as the two versions of the same event may be presented differently. The idea that media do not reflect the reality was promoted by Stephen Reese and Pamela Shoemaker (1996), who offered that media content can be shaped by five layers of influence: individual media worker, media routine, organisational influence, Extra-media influence, and social system influence.

A. Individual Influence: The influence of workers socialisation and attitude on the content. Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, status, the education of communicators, etc., also bear influence on the media.

B. Influence of Media Routine: This presupposes the influence of media companies' orientation and organisation on workers and the media content. News value, organisation's news perspective, gatekeeping, etc. are example of routine influence on media content.

C. Organisational Influence: Macroscopic influence beyond individuals and routines' influence. Here, the size of organisation, economic interest, business perspective, structure, policy, goals, etc. affect what gets published or not.

D. Extra-media Influence: Influence of economic and cultural forces, external to workers, organisation and audience, on the content. Source, advertisers, public relations interests, government control, competition, etc. play tremendous role in shaping content.

E. Social System Influence: The influence of ideological and hegemonic pressure from dominant powers in the society on the media content.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, it was submitted that theories undergirding mass communication are too numerous to be fully captured by a single book volume, not to talk of a section of a book. Hence, what has been offered here is a theoretical 'tip of the iceberg'. In addition, the chapter is concluding with succinct explication of a number of theories, from allied scholastic perspectives, that are equally central to unpacking mass communication and media studies phenomena. The theories include information processing theory, which explains how humungous information given by the media is screened out into cognitively relevant ones; elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981) which explains how information are rationally or emotionally processed, based on degree of involvement; entertainment education theory, promoted to explain how individual, community, institutional and societal changes can be achieved through integration of educational and social issues in the conception, making, production, processing, and diffusion of an entertainment programme; social marketing theory, concerned with

promotion of socially valuable information through deployment of techniques for product marketing through persuasive communication; media credibility theory, “a multidimensional construct that measures the perceived believability of a message (article, news cast, documentary, etc.), source (journalist or media company), or medium (newspaper, website, radio station, etc.)” (Meyer, Marchionni & Thorson, 2010, pp. 104-105); media displacement theory, which, based on time and resource constraints, presupposes replacement of a particular medium by another that meets the functions of previous medium/media in a more effective and efficient ways.

Other contemporary theories include collateral media instruction theory, which looked at unintended lessons the audience derives from media content; social judgment theory that explicates how media play roles in making people learn social norms, trends, customs, and language (DeFleur, 2010); priming theory, an offshoot of agenda-setting that explains how media emphasis on an aspect of reality influence audience evaluation of reality; catharsis theory, which explains how exposure to mediated violence releases violent tension from the audience; desensitisation hypothesis, an opposite to catharsis hypothesis that presumed disinhibition effect that numbs people from real life violence; commodification of culture theory, which explains how culture are mass produced, circulated and marketed at face value rather than intrinsic value rooted in debates on high and folk cultures. The list is endless, however, attempt has been made here to highlight key theories that are useful in deconstructing mediated communication phenomena from the dawn of Industrial Revolution to the age of Information Revolution. These theories are well-developed and substantiated with empirical supports that illuminate their key constructs and methodological nuances.

Learning Outcomes

In this chapter, you would have learnt about:

1. Evolution of theories in mass communication and mass media studies
2. Different eras in the development of theories of mass communication

3. Divergent perspectives to theorising mass communication, media and cultural studies

Discussion Questions

1. What are the issues that reinforced the beliefs held by the mass society theorists?
2. How are limited effects theories debunking the assertion of direct, immediate, powerful and uniform effects of mass media on the audience?
3. Explain the two major variants of alternative paradigm to theorising mass communication.
4. Explain the relevance of normative theories to understanding of media-political systems relationships.
5. Attempt a succinct yet apt description of three (3) theoretical formulations within the individual perspective to theorising mass communication.
6. Provide brief explanations of three (3) theories concerned with macroscopic effects of mass media.
7. Describe theories that provide understanding of routine activities in mass communication work.

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