



COMMUNICATION THEORY

EMC 3460 Media & Messages // Feb. 6



COMMUNICATION THEORY

- What does theory tell us about audiences?
 - Helps explain the effects **media** has on audiences.
 - Helps explain the effects **messages** have on audiences.
 - Helps explain how people construct their perspectives.
- What does this have to do with our projects?
 - Media theories can help you develop your persuasive messages.
 - How can you apply these explanations in a practical way?

COMMUNICATION THEORY

- Three categories of media effects theory:
 - Powerful Effects
 - Limited Effects
 - Specific Effects

POWERFUL EFFECTS

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- Hypodermic Needle (Magic Bullet)
 - Powerful media adversely affect weak audiences
 - Media messages are directly received and accepted by the audience
 - Has been disproved by social scientists
 - Some still consider it when discussing media's impact on children

POWERFUL EFFECTS: EXAMPLES

- *War of the Worlds*
 - Episode of radio drama, aired on October 30, 1938
 - Implied that a Martian invasion was occurring
 - Caused “widespread” panic, led to new warnings from the FCC
- World War II propaganda
 - Nazi Germany effectively mobilized using mass media

LIMITED EFFECTS

LIMITED EFFECTS (MINIMAL EFFECTS)

- Media alone cannot cause people to change attitudes or behaviors.
- Instead, mass media reinforce existing attitudes or behaviors rather than change them.

LIMITED EFFECTS (MINIMAL EFFECTS)

- Selective exposure
 - People expose themselves to media messages most familiar to them, that fit in line with their world view.
- Selective retention
 - People retain messages that confirm values and attitudes they already hold.
- Selective perception
 - People perceive what they want to in media messages while ignoring opposing viewpoints.

LIMITED EFFECTS (MINIMAL EFFECTS)

➤ Two-Step Flow

➤ *The People's Choice* (1948)

➤ Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet

➤ Interpersonal interaction has a far stronger effect on shaping public opinion than mass media outlets.

➤ Audiences are influenced by opinion leaders — politicians, public intellectuals, pundits, scholars — who are influenced by mass media.

LIMITED EFFECTS (MINIMAL EFFECTS)

➤ Joseph Klapper

➤ *The Effects of Mass Communication (1960)*

➤ Mass media only influences individuals who did not already hold strong views on an issue; greater impact on poor and uneducated.

➤ Effects are limited because:

➤ It depends on the message content.

➤ The manner in which the message is constructed.

➤ The knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and pre-dispositions a person holds before exposure to message.

SPECIFIC EFFECTS

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➤ Uses and Gratifications

- A response to limited effects theory to counter the idea that audiences are passive.
- People actively engage in using media to satisfy various emotional or intellectual needs:
 - Entertainment
 - Social interaction
 - Information
 - Escapism
- Addresses functions of media, not impact of media on society.

SPECIFIC EFFECTS

- Agenda Setting
 - Mass media focus attention on particular events, determining what people discuss.
 - Media tells you **what to think about** not necessarily **what to think**.
 - The more stories the media do on a particular subject, the more importance audiences attach to that subject.

SPECIFIC EFFECTS

- Framing
 - Related to Agenda Setting
 - Process of the media that makes some information more noticeable or important than other information in such a way that it influences how audiences perceive information, events, issues.
 - Example: Gay marriage can be framed as a:
 - Civil Rights issue
 - States Rights issue
 - Moral issue
 - Family issue

SPECIFIC EFFECTS

➤ Priming

- Focus of Agenda-Setting research in 1980s
- Media images stimulate related thoughts in the minds of audience members.
- Examples:
 - What does a credible person look like?
 - Media gives context to the way audiences understand political issues.

SPECIFIC EFFECTS

➤ Cultivation Theory

- The more television one watches, the more they view the world as what's reflected on television.
- Research led by George Gerbner
- Distinct qualities of television, like production or narrative style, cut across genre or program type and create communal messages about reality.
- “Mean world syndrome”
- Effects on: television violence, body image, romance ideals

SPECIFIC EFFECTS

➤ Spiral of Silence

- Developed by German theorist Elisabeth Noell-Neumann in 1970s & 1980s.
- People are hesitant to speak minority opinions out of fear of isolation.
- Dominant or majority points of view make it difficult for people with opposing points of view to voice their opinions.
- Mass media can help create a false, overrated majority.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY



SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

- We translate the world around us in light of the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes we hold and individually socially construct our version of reality.
- We organize our world around:
 - **Schema** - how we view ourselves, how we view others, how we think people should behave
 - **Scripts** - social norms
- We experience media (texts) in different ways and construct meaning in different ways.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE THEORY

- Individuals seek consistency between their expectations and their reality.
- People engage in a process called dissonance reduction to bring their cognitions and actions in line with one another.
- Dissonance may be reduced by:
 - altering behavior: *start using a seat belt*
 - seeking information that is in agreement with the behavior: *air bags are safer than seat belts*
- The feeling of having two conflicting thoughts or attitudes:
 - *I will go to the gym ... after I eat a Big Mac.*