**Bonga University**

**College of Social Sciences and Humanities**

**Department of English language and Literature**

**Course syllabus/Guide book**

Course Title: **Introduction to Communication Theories** Credit hours **2**

Course code: **EnLa3101** ECTS: **3**

Academic year: **2012 E.C or 2020 G.C**  Semester:  **2**

Mode of delivery: **Block** Target students: **3rd English major students**

1. **Personal Information**

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1. **Course objectives**

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

* Describe a working knowledge of theories that explain a wide range of communication phenomena.
* Tell and distinguish various theories of communication
* Obtain an overview of media effects
* Provide a brief account of some of the most influential theories of communication

1. **Course Description**

This course mainly focuses on exposing students to the variety of communication theories and their applications in the real world. It aims at giving learners an understanding of the communication process, communication models and theories, the general principles of communication and how they can be used to promote communication. It explores intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, inter-cultural and mass communication theories.

1. **Course Contents**

* **Chapter 1: Introduction and historical contexts of communication theories** 
  1. Nature and definition of communication
  2. Types of communication
  3. Purposes of communication
  4. Historical development of communication theories
  5. Criteria for good theory

**Chapter 2: Intrapersonal Communication Theories**

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2.2. Hierarchy of needs

2.3. Attribution theory

2.4. Constructivism

**Chapter 3: Messages**

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3.3. Coordinated management of meaning

3.4. Nonverbal expectancy

**Chapter 4: Interpersonal communication Theories**

* 1. Social penetration theory
  2. Uncertainty reduction theory
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  4. Social exchange theory
  5. Cognitive dissonance theory

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6.4.2. Social learning theory

6.4.3. Agenda setting

6.4.4. Spiral of silence

6.4.5. Hypodermic needle theory

6.4.6. Two steps flow theory

**5. Assessment**

1. Continuous Assessment (50%)

• Quiz …………………………………………..…..10 %

• Term-Paper Group ………………………….......10 %

• Term Paper Individual ……………………….….10%

• Test 1 ………………………………………………..10 %

• Test 2 ……………………………………………….10%

2. Final Exam (50%)

**6. References**

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# Chapter One: Introduction and Historical Contexts of Communication Theories

**Introduction**

**Dear Learner:** Welcome to the first chapter!This chapter entirely focuses on human communication. In the first part, the definition of communication along with types of communication will be discussed. You will be looking at various functions of human communication. The historical development of communication theory along with different criteria for good theorize will be elaborately elucidated. In each part of the discussion, there are self-exercise questions that have been provided for you.

**Objectives of the Chapter**

After you have completed reading the unit, you will be able:

* to define communication;
* to identify different types of communication;
* to understand the various functions of communication to humans;
* to figure out the historical development of communication theory;
* to identify the different criteria for good theories.

# Definition of Communication

Communication is an ever continuing process and an integral part of the world of all living things. The need for communication is as basic as the hunger for food and drink, perhaps even more so. It is an individual as well as a social need.

Derived from the Latin word communis, meaning common, communication is a synonym for interchange, dialogue, sharing, interaction or communion. It is the passing of meaningful messages and the receiving of feedback. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines communication as ‘the exchange of meaning between individuals or groups through a common system of symbols or language’.

Communication is difficult to define. Different scholars have defined communication severally but relying seriously upon their different fields of study. Hence, in communication, we have scholars of sociology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, engineering, mathematics, etc defining communication to suit their various purposes. Some of these scholars are:

Stevens (2004), who defines communication as: "The discriminatory response of an organism to stimuli from the use of the words ‘discriminatory’ ‘response’ and ‘stimuli’. It becomes obvious that this scholar is a psychologist.

Hovland (2013), defines it as: "The process whereby an individual transmits stimuli, usually  
verbal, to influence the behavior of another individual". He, however, prefaces this definition  
by saying that "communication is the sharing of meaning ..." Hovland has given an  
anthropocentric perspective to this definition. Hence, the definition is "Human Centred" Hovlandis said to be the father of modern "Rhetorics". This is because he has done a lot of works and researches on PERSUASION. That is, how to use persuasion to change people's attitudes.

Schacter (2014) **-** as: "The mechanism by which power is exercised". This scholar is a political  
scientist. How does his definition affect communication? When two people communicate, power is at play. This definition is relevant to the significance and importance of communication. In the political context, power is a very important weapon. The government often wants to monopolize power and of course, muffle the press”. Communication, they say, is power; hence, if you can catch people's wind by manipulating them through communication, then you are fully in control. America, for instance, has tried to colonize the world through its media.

Cooley (2012): "The mechanisms through which human relations exist and develop all the  
symbols of the mind together, with the means of conveying them through space and presenting  
them in time". This scholar is a sociologist. He has brought in the 'symbolic - interactionist  
the perspective of sociology into communication. This perspective has a lot of implications for  
communication as this theme of 'interactionism' is a very important tool for determining the role of communication in a society.

Steinfatt (2015): "The process of exchanging mutually understood symbols". Sarbaugh (2011): "The process of using signs and symbols which elicit meaning in another  
person or persons". Both Steinfatt's and Sarbaugh's definitions are based on the context of symbols. Sarbaugh'sdefinition is more inclusive than Steinfatt's because he brought in the use of signs. Also, the concept of 'meaning' is more explicit in his definition than in Steinfatt's definition where the concept is only implicit. However, both of them have approached communication from the linguistic or psycho-linguistic points of view.  
Furthermore, many Nigerian communication scholars have different views as what to constitute communication.  
  
Ugboajah (2001): The process which involves all acts of transmitting messages to channels  
which link people to the languages and symbolic codes which are used to transmit such  
messages. It is also the means by which such messages are received and stored. It includes the  
rules, customs, and conventions which define and regulate human relationships and events.

Folarin (2003): Any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another. Cooley (2009): says that "the mechanisms through which human relations exist and develop all the symbols of the mind together, with the means of conveying them through space and presenting them in time." This scholar is a sociologist. He has brought in the ‘symbolic- interactionist perspective of sociology into communication. This perspective has a lot of implications for communication as this theme of 'interactionism' is a very important tool for determining the role of communication in a society.

Our first task is to create a common understanding of the term communication. Defining communication can be challenging. Katherine Miller (2005) underscores this dilemma, stating that “conceptualizations of communication have been abundant and have changed substantially over the years.”

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What does the word communication mean? Explain the need for communication for humans.

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2. All living animals communicate. Do you agree? Justify your position. What makes human communication different from that of other animals?   
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3. How has development in technology influenced communication?

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# Types of Human Communication

Scholars categorize different types of communication. These distinctions are somewhat artificial since types of communication more realistically fit on a continuum rather than in separate categories. Nevertheless, to understand the various types of communication, it is helpful to consider various factors. The distinguishing characteristics include the following:

• A number of communicators (one through many).

• The physical proximity of the communicators in relation to each other (close or distant).

• The context of the communication (whether face-to-face or mediated).

Note that each level of communication may be formal or informal, personal or impersonal. Note also that the purposes of communication may vary and overlap, giving a communicator a potentially wide list of choices for communication channels.

Based on some of the criteria listed in the above paragraph, human communication can be categorized in a five pattern as intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, group communication, public communication and mass communication.

## Intrapersonal Communication

Intrapersonal communication – means “communicating with oneself.” It is a type of communication whereby a person interacts with himself/herself. This type of communication is intrinsic or reflective because it involves the process of understanding and sharing meaning within oneself. In short, it is communication that occurs within your mind.

Intrapersonal communication takes place within a single person, often for the purpose of clarifying ideas or analyzing a situation. Other times, intrapersonal communication is undertaken in order to reflect upon or appreciate something. Three aspects of intrapersonal communication are self-concept, perception and expectation.

Self-concept is the basis for intrapersonal communication, because it determines how a person sees him/herself and is oriented toward others. Self-concept (also called self-awareness) involves three factors: beliefs, values and attitudes. Beliefs are basic personal orientation toward what is true or false, good or bad; beliefs can be descriptive or prescriptive. Values are deep-seated orientations and ideas, generally based on and consistent with beliefs, about right and wrong ideas and actions. Attitudes are learned predisposition toward or against a topic, ideals that stem from and generally are consistent with values. Attitudes often are global, typically emotional.

Beliefs, values and attitudes all influence behavior, which can be either spoken opinion or physical action. Some psychologists include body image as an aspect of intrapersonal communication, in that body image is a way of perceiving ourselves, positively or negatively, according to the social standards of our culture.

Other things that can affect self-concept are personal attributes, talents, social role, even birth order. Whereas self-concept focuses internally, perception looks outward. Perception of the outside world also is rooted in beliefs, values and attitudes. It is so closely intertwined with a self-concept that one feeds off the other, creating a harmonious understanding of both oneself and one’s world. Meanwhile, expectations are future-oriented messages dealing with long-term roles, sometimes called life scripts. These sometimes are projections of learned relationships within the family or society.

## Interpersonal Communication

It is a type of communication where there is one-to-one interaction or interaction among a small group. This is the most commonly used/practiced form of communication. It’s typical feature is that it helps people to build closer relationships.

Communicating interpersonally is a “way of life” in organizations. Not only is interpersonal communication inescapable, but also your abilities in this area are of paramount importance. Interpersonal competence in recent years has been consistently ranked high as an important requirement for successful job performance. This is why companies and institutions put a high premium on interpersonal communication (see below a recent NUS invitation for staff to attend an interpersonal communication talk).

Interpersonal communication involves a direct face-to-face relationship between the sender and receiver of a message, who are in an interdependent relationship. Because of interpersonal communication’s immediacy (it is taking place now) and primacy (it is taking place here), it is characterized by a strong feedback component. Communication is enhanced when the relationship exists over a long period of time. Interpersonal communication involves not only the words used but also the various elements of nonverbal communication.

The purposes of interpersonal communication are to influence, help and discover, as well as to share and play together. Interpersonal communication can be categorized by the number of participants.

• **Dyadic communication** involves two people. Example: Two friends talking.

• **Group communication** involves three or more persons, through communication scholars are inconsistent as to the top end of the number scale. The smaller the number in the group, the more closely this mode resembles interpersonal communication. Often group communication is done for the purpose of problem-solving or decision making. Example: University study group.

• **Public communication** involves a large group with a primarily one-way monologue style generating only minimal feedback. Information sharing, entertainment and persuasion are common purposes of public communication. Example: Lecture in a university class.

## Group Communication

Much communication takes place in the context of small groups, which are defined as those of three or more participants. The various and overlapping types of small groups lead to various types of communication patterns. Social groups are units such as families, friends living as roommates, and voluntary recreational groups such as soccer teams.

Families also form primary groups, which are defined as those in which people share living and financial arrangements. Families also are an example of reference groups, through which participants gain a sense of identity and an awareness of expected behavior. Workgroups are another pattern of relationships. These are built by people who are drawn together by a common task, such as students working together on a project or company employees assigned to a common job activity. Decision-making groups are brought together for the purpose of dealing with a question or policy.

Similarly though distinctly, problem-solving groups focus on resolving a problem. In small group communication, every person can participate actively with the other members. Group communication involves three or more persons, through communication scholars are inconsistent as to the top end of the number scale. Small groups are a common fixture of everyday life. Your family is a group. Soare an athletic team, a collection of fellow workers, and a group of students working on a class project?

## Public Communication

Public communication involves a large group with a primarily one-way monologue style generating only minimal feedback. This doesn’t mean that speakers operate in a vacuum when delivering their remarks. Audiences often have a chance to ask questions and offer brief comments, and their nonverbal reactions offer a wide range of clues about their reception of the speaker’s remarks. Information sharing, entertainment and persuasion are common purposes of public communication. Example: Lecture in a university class. Lecture classes, convocations and speeches at religious services are some of the examples for this kind of communication. This type of communication is recognized by its formality, structure and planning. This means, in this type of communication, the speaker usually prepares written or unwritten scripts before he/she delivers the message.

## Mass Communication

The simplest definition of mass communication is **“public communication transmitted electronically or mechanically.”** In this way, messages are transmitted or sent to large, perhaps millions or billions of people spread across the world. Mass communication is a type of communication where a large body (millions of people) of people are addressed. It consists of messages that are transmitted to large, widespread audiences via electronic and print media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and so on. Mass communication differs from the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, and public varieties in several ways.

First, mass messages are aimed at a large audience without any personal contact between sender and receivers. Second, most of the messages sent via mass communication channels are developed, or at least financed, by large organizations. In this sense, mass communication is far less personal and more of a product than the other types we have examined so far.

Finally, mass communication is almost always controlled by many gatekeepers who determine what messages will be delivered to consumers, how they will be constructed, and when they will be delivered. Sponsors (whether corporate or governmental), editors, producers, reporters, and executives all have the power to influence mass messages in ways that don’t affect most other types. Because of these and other unique characteristics, the study of mass communication raises special issues and deserves special treatment. We enjoy all that entertainment, music, reality shows, serials, beauty parades and fashion shows. From newspapers and magazines, we have moved over to films, television and the internet. All these are different forms of mass media and what they do is to communicate with the large unseen audiences nationally and internationally.

**How are these messages sent?**

They are sent through different forms of mass media such as newspapers, magazines, films, radio, television and the internet. Media is the plural for the word medium or ‘means of communication.’ Means of communication is also called channel of communication. Mass communication can therefore also be defined as ‘who’, ‘says what’, ‘in which channel’, ‘to whom’, ‘with what effect.’

**‘Who’:** refers to the communicator.

**Says ‘what’?** Here ‘what’ means the message? What the communicator has written, spoken or shown is the message.

**‘In what channel’:** This refers to the medium or channels like the newspaper, radio, or television.

**‘To whom’:** This refers to the person receiving the message or the receiver.

Mass communication is characterized by the transmission of complex messages to large and diverse audiences, using sophisticated technology of communication. Mass media refers to the institutions that provide such messages: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, film and multimedia Web sites. The term also is used for the specific institutions of mass media, such as radio networks and television stations, movie companies, music producers, and the Internet.

**Here are some distinguishing characteristics of mass communication.**

The source of mass communication message generally is a person or group operating within an organizational setting. Examples of these sources are news reporters, television producers and magazine editors. Likewise, the source generally is multiple entities, and the resulting message is the work of several persons. For example, producers, writers, actors, directors and video editors all work together to create a television program. Publishers, reporters, editors, copyeditors, typesetters, graphic designers and photographers together produce a magazine article.

Mass media messages are sophisticated and complex. Whereas the message in interpersonal communication may be simple words and short sentences, mass media messages are quite elaborate. Examples of mass media message are a news report, a novel, a movie, a television program, a magazine article, a newspaper column, a music video, and a billboard advertisement.

Channels of mass media, also called mass vehicles, involve one or more aspects of technology. Radio, for example, involves tape machines, microphones, devices that digitize sound waves, transmitters that disseminate them and receiving units that decode the sound waves and render them back into audio form approximating the original. Sometimes, as in the case of musical recording, the channel of mass communication may even enhance the sound quality of the original.

Audiences generally are **self-selected**; people who tune in to a particular television or who read a particular magazine. Mass audiences also are **heterogeneous**, meaning that they are both large and diverse. They actually are made up of groups of people with dissimilar background, demographics, and socio-political characteristics; they are spread over a vast geographic area. Such audiences are brought together by a single shared interest in the particular message available through the mass medium. Message sources generally have only limited information about their audiences. Radio station managers may know audience demographics such as average ages, incomes, political interests, and so on, but they know little about the individual members of the audience. Indeed, one characteristic of mass media is that the audience members essentially remain anonymous.

Feedback is minimal in mass media, and no real give-and-take is practically possible. Message flow typically is **one-wa**y, from source to receiver. Traditionally, the feedback has been minimal and generally delayed. A newspaper reader could write a letter to the editor; a television viewer might respond to a survey. With the Internet, new possibilities are being found to increase feedback, but it remains limited. Like other forms of mediated communication, noise exists in the mass context. Noise may be semantic, environmental or mechanical.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

* Define the following terms
* Dyadic-communication

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* Group Communication

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* Intrapersonal Communication

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* Mass Communication

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* Impersonal communication

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* Public Communication

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# Purposes of Communication

Now that we have a working understanding of the term communication, it is important to discuss why we will spend so much time exploring this subject. Perhaps the strongest argument for studying communication is its central role in our lives. The amount of time we spend communicating is staggering. In one study, researchers measured the amount of time a sample group of college students spent on various activities. They found that the subjects spent an average of over 61 percent of their waking hours engaged in some form of communication. Whatever one’s occupation, the results of such a study would not be too different. Most of us are surrounded by others, trying to understand them and hoping that they understand us: family, friends, coworkers, teachers, and strangers. There’s a good reason why we speak, listen, read, and write so much: Communication satisfies most of our needs.

In General, we will look at communication functions in five specific ways.

**A. Communication helps us assert and differentiate our personality**

From the moment we were born, we were engaged in the communication process. Our parents  
talked to us, read books to us, and played games with us. It is through communication that we  
learned our name and gender; we learned about love, frustration, and fear; and we learned how to be part of a family. Specifically, communicating with others helped us to create who we are. For example, what does it mean to be a girl in our society? Well, that all depends on whom you ask.

In some families, it means to take care of all the household chores like cooking, cleaning, and  
laundry. Although social expectations are changing and some families share all the household  
responsibilities, in many homes, gender stereotypes dictate who does what.

**B**. **Communication helps us create communities**

We all live and interact in a community of some kind just by virtue of living in a house,  
apartment, or dorm. But communities are more than geographic locations. Communities are also created by shared meanings for symbols. These shared meanings bind people together in support or work networks. So, someone who lives hundreds or thousands of miles from you could be part of your social community because you both share a similar language or symbol system.

**C. Communication forms and strengthens relationships**

Through communication, we form human bonds that, in turn, form our friendships, families, and work relationships. We fall in love using communication. We solve problems at work by  
communicating with our co-workers, and we create lasting friendships by sharing stories, experiencing new things, and being supportive of one another. It is through communication that we share our emotions and feelings.

**D**. **Communications help us to influence others**

Communication allows us to sell products, campaign for an issue or candidate, debate a topic in class, and get the other person to think like us. Persuasion is an integral part of our lives because it allows us to influence people and sell our views to them.

**E**. **Communication conveys and creates information**

Communication helps us create information and knowledge. We learn from one another and use that information to develop new ideas and concepts. Communication allows us to find  
information that will help us fulfill our needs. In our knowledge base world today, the  
information you are distinguished by the level of information communicated to you, through  
several media of communication, e.g. Internet, Radio, Television, Print Media etc.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What are the differences between human and other animals’ communication?

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1. What are the characteristics of human communication?

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1. What are the various functions of communication to human beings? Explain each of the functions in your own terms.

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# Historical Development of Communication Theories

Communication has existed since the beginning of human beings, but it was not until the 20th century that people began to study its process. As communication technologies developed, so did the serious study of communication. When World War I ended, the interest in studying communication intensified. The social science study was fully recognized as a legitimate discipline after World War II.

Before becoming simply communication, or communication studies, the discipline was formed from three other major studies: psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Psychology is the study of human behavior, Sociology is the study of society and social process, and anthropology is the study of communication as a factor which develops, maintains, and changes the culture. Communication studies focus on communication as central to the human experience, which involves understanding how people behave in creating, exchanging, and interpreting messages.

Communication Theory has one universal law posited by S. F. Scudder (1980). The Universal Communication Law states that "All living entities, beings and creatures communicate." All of the living communicates through movements, sounds, reactions, physical changes, gestures, languages, breath, etc. Communication is a means of survival.

Examples - the cry of a child (communication that it is hungry, hurt, cold, etc.); the browning of a leaf (communication that it is dehydrated, thirsty per se, dying); the cry of an animal (communicating that it is injured, hungry, angry, etc.). Everything living communicates in its quest for survival."

# Criteria for Good Theory

There are different features for evaluating a good theory. The following criteria are generally accepted as useful measures for evaluating communication theory: scope, logical consistency, parsimony, utility, testability, heurism, and the test of time. We will discuss each of them briefly.

* Scope

A criterion for evaluating theories; refers to the breadth of communication behaviors covered in the theory. Scope refers to the breadth of communication behaviors covered by the theory. Boundaries are the limits of a theory’s scope. Although theories should explain enough of communication to be meaningful, they should also have clear boundaries specifying the limits of their scope. Some theories cover a relatively narrow range of behaviors, whereas others try for the much larger scope. Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), for example, originally was bounded by initial encounters between strangers. In some ways, this suggests a rather limited scope for the theory. However, although the duration of initial encounters is short, it is true that people spend a great deal of time throughout their lives meeting and conversing with new people. Thus, the scope of the theory may seem a bit broader upon reflection.

* Logical Consistency

Simply put, theories should make sense and have an internal logical consistency that is clear and not contradictory. Theories should provide us with good explanations that show us how the concepts work together and what results follow from their interactions. In addition, the claims made by the theory should be consistent with the assumptions of the theory. If a theory is constructed using the covering law approach, it would be inconsistent for the theory to focus on people’s choices and idiosyncratic activities. Logical consistency means that the theory “hangs together” and doesn’t contradict itself, either by advancing two propositions that are in conflict with each other or by failing to operate within the parameters of its assumptions. Logical consistency is to mean a criterion for evaluating theories; refers to the internal logic in the theoretical statements.

* Parsimony

Parsimony refers to the simplicity of the explanation provided by the theory. Theories should contain only the number of concepts necessary to explain the phenomenon under consideration. If a theory can explain a person’s communication behavior satisfactorily by using one concept (such as expectancy violations), that may be more useful than having to use five or six concepts. However, because theories of communication and social behavior are dealing with complex phenomena, they may have to be complex themselves. Parsimony requires simplicity without sacrificing completeness.

* Utility

This criterion refers to the theory’s usefulness or practical value. A good theory has utility in that it tells us a great deal about communication and human behavior. It allows us to understand some element of communication that was previously unclear. It weaves together pieces of information in such a way that we are able to see a pattern that was previously unclear to us. In so doing, theories can shape and change our behavior.

* Testability

Testability refers to our ability to investigate a theory’s accuracy. One of the biggest issues involved in testability concerns the specificity of the concepts that are central to the theory. For example, according to Social Exchange Theory is predicated on the concepts of costs and rewards. The theory predicts that people will engage in behaviors that they find rewarding and avoid behaviors that are costly to them. However, the theory does not clearly define costs and rewards. In fact, the terms are defined in a circular fashion: Behaviors that people engage in repeatedly are rewarding, and those that they avoid are costly.

You can see how difficult it is to test the central prediction of Social Exchange Theory given this circular definition. This criterion is more useful in theories framed from an objectivist epistemology than those from a subjectivist epistemology.

* Heurism

A criterion for evaluating theories; refers to the amount of research and new thinking stimulated by the theory. Heurism refers to the amount of research and new thinking that is stimulated by the theory. Theories are judged to be good to the extent that they generate insights and new research. Although not all theories produce a great deal of research, an effective theory prompts some research activity. For example, the theory of Cultural Studies came from many diverse disciplines and has stimulated research programs in English, anthropology, social psychology, and communication.

* Test of time

Test of time means a criterion for evaluating theories; refers to the theory’s durability over time. The final criterion, the test of time, can be used only after some time has passed since the theory’s creation. Are these theories still generating research or have they been discarded as outmoded? Deciding whether a theory has withstood the test of time is often arbitrary. For instance, if a theory was conceptualized and tested in the 1970s but has remained dormant in the literature for over a decade and is now being reintegrated into research, has this theory satisfied the test of time? Judging this criterion is often a subjective process.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What are the criteria for evaluating theories? Explain them in own understanding.

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2. What is the difference between parsimony and heurism?

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# Chapter Two: Intrapersonal Communication Theories

**Introduction**

**Dear Learner:** Welcome to the second chapter! In this chapter, you are going to learn about intrapersonal communication theories. The first part of the chapter discusses social interaction theory. The second part entirely deals with the hierarchy of human needs. The parts talks about attribution theory and the final part discuss constructivism. In fact, exercise questions are given to you after each section so that you will broaden your understanding.

**Objectives of the chapter**

After you have completed reading the chapter, you will be able:

* to define symbolic interaction theory
* to understand the various hierarchy of human needs;
* to identify the attribution theory;
* to find out the concept of constructivism theory;

# Symbolic Interaction Theory

People are motivated to act based on the meanings they assign to people, things, and events. These meanings are created in the language that people use both in communicating with others (interpersonal context) and in self-talk (intrapersonal context), or their own private thought. Language allows people to develop a sense of self and to interact with others in the community. Further, meaning is created in the language that people use both with others and in private thought. Language allows people to develop a sense of self and to interact with others in the community.

Symbolic Interaction Theory holds that individuals construct meaning through the communication process because meaning is not intrinsic to anything. It takes people to make meaning. In fact, the goal of interaction, according to the theory, is to create shared meaning. This is the case because without shared meaning communication is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

**Themes and Assumptions of Symbolic Interaction Theory**

Symbolic Interaction is based on ideas about the self and its relationship to society. Because this can be interpreted very broadly, we wish to spend some time detailing the themes of the theory and, in the process, reveal the assumptions framing the theory.

LaRossa and Reitzes (1993) have examined the Symbolic Interaction Theory as it relates to the study of families. They note that seven central assumptions ground the theory and that these assumptions reflect three central themes:

* the importance of meanings for human behavior
* the importance of the self-concept
* the relationship between the individual and society.

Let’s give an example. In the United States, we generally associate wedding rings with love and commitment. The ring is a symbol of a legal and emotional bond, and thus most people invest the symbol with a positive connotation. However, some people see marriage as an oppressive institution. Those people will respond negatively to wedding rings and any other symbols of what they perceive as a degrading situation. The point that Symbolic Interaction theorists make is that the ring itself has no specific meaning; it takes on meaning as people interact and invest it with importance. According to LaRossa and Reitzes, this theme supports three main assumptions, which are taken from Herbert Blumer’s (1969) work. These assumptions are as follows:

• Humans act toward others on the basis of the meanings those others have for them.

• Meaning is created in interaction between people.

• Meaning is modified through an interpretive process.

**Humans act toward others on the basis of the meanings those others have for them**

This assumption explains behavior as a loop between stimuli and the responses people exhibit to those stimuli. Symbolic Interaction theorists such as Herbert Blumer were concerned with the meaning behind the behavior. They looked for meaning by examining psychological and sociological explanations for behavior. Thus, as researchers study the behaviors of Roger Thomas (from our beginning scenario), they see him making meanings that are congruent with the social forces that shape him. For instance, Roger assigns meaning to his new work experience by applying commonly agreed-upon interpretations to the things he sees. When he sees the age of his co-workers, he believes that they have more experience than he does because, in the United States, we often equate age with experience. Furthermore, SI researchers are interested in the meaning that Roger attaches to his encounter with Helen (for example, he is cheered up and believes they will become friends).

**Meaning is created in interaction between people**

Mead stresses the intersubjective basis of meaning. Meaning can exist, according to Mead, only when people share common interpretations of the symbols they exchange in interaction. Blumer (1969) explains that there are three ways of accounting for the origin of meaning. One approach regards meaning as being intrinsic to the thing. Blumer states, “Thus, a chair is clearly a chair in itself . . . the meaning emanates, so to speak, from the thing and as such there is no process involved in its formation; all that is necessary is to recognize the meaning that is there in the thing” (pp. 3–4).

**Meaning is modified through an interpretive process**

Blumer notes that this interpretive process has two steps. First, communicators point out the things that have meaning. Blumer argues that this part of the process is different from a psychological approach and consists of people engaging in communication with themselves. Thus, as Roger gets ready for work in the morning, he communicates with himself about the areas that are meaningful to him. The second step involves communicators selecting, checking, and transforming the meanings in the context in which they find themselves. When Roger talks with Helen, he listens for her remarks that are relevant to the areas he has decided are meaningful. Further, in his interpretation process, Roger depends on the shared social meanings that are culturally accepted. Thus, Roger and Helen are able to converse relatively easily because they both come from similar co-cultures.

To review, we list the themes that ground the theory and the assumptions they support:

**THEMES**

• The importance of meanings for human behavior

• The importance of the self-concept

• The relationship between the individual and society.

**ASSUMPTIONS**

• Humans act toward others on the basis of the meanings those others have for them.

• Meaning is created in interaction between people.

• Meaning is modified through an interpretive process.

• Individuals develop self-concepts through interaction with others.

• Self-concepts provide an important motive for behavior.

• People and groups are influenced by cultural and social processes.

• Social structure is worked out through social interaction.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1.What is the core concept of Social Interection Theory?

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2. What are the themes and assumptions of Social Interection Theory?

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# Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow recommends that to send messages to potential receivers, one must keep in mind the following five rungs of human needs.

**Basic physical needs**: air, food, shelter, sleep and clothing.

**Safety and security needs**: This is keeping oneself free from physical harm or mental abuse.

**The need to belong:** Most of us want to feel that we are part of a group and that we have friends and enjoy being with our co-workers, feeling comfortable in the society in which we live.

**The need to be someone**: Most of us want to feel that we are good at doing something, and we feel very pleased with the recognition we receive. We feel that we are “somebody”. We have met the need of our ego.

**The need to help others and be creative**: If we are reasonably able to meet all the previous needs, we will then seem to lose all our anxieties and fears. Two things happen: (1) We are more willing to help people who are still struggling on the lower rungs of the ladder; those who are still striving to meet their physical, safety and security needs. (2) We become more creative, and want to create people to improve the qualities of life for us all.

**Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of needs**

**Self - Actualization needs**

**Esteem**

**needs**

**Social**

**needs**

**Safety needs**

**Physiological**

**needs**

**Physiological needs:** Hunger, thirst, etc.,

**Safety needs:** To feel secure & safe, out of danger

**Social needs:** Affiliate with others, be accepted & belong

**Esteem needs:** To achieve, be component, gain approval and belongingness

**Self-actualization needs:** Self-fulfillment & realize one’s potential

If we fulfill our needs at one level, then we can focus on satisfying the need on the next higher level

**Self-actualized characteristics**

• Perceive reality accurately

• Tolerate uncertainty

• Accept oneself without guilt or anxiety

• Solve problems effectively

• Possess a strong social awareness

**SELF-TEST EXERCISE**

* What are Abraham Maslow’s hierarchies of needs?

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# 2.3. Attribution Theory

**Definition**

Attribution – Assigning some quality or character of a person or thing. Attribution theory explains how and why ordinary people explain things as they do. Everybody tries to make sense in this social world. People try to find the cause and effects even if they are in none.

Attribution theory is the study which comes under the social Psychology, through this theory Heider explains the causes of Individual behaviors and events. The Attribution theory was introduced by Heider but later it was developed by various psychologists and based on this theory various models were attempted to explain the behavioral processes of attribution.

According to Heider, How a person understands the event and how the event is related to the person’s thinking process and their behavior. Attribution theory tends to explain the certain basic question of individuals. “How others do and what they do”. A person interprets with himself “why others do something which may cause an attribute of one’s behavior. Most of our attributions are driven by our emotional and motivational impulses. Fritz Heider classified the attribution theory into two types as

1. Internal Attribution and 2. External or Explanatory Attribution

**1. Internal Attribution**

When a person is motivating for a certain action and questioned about it, the person needs to explain the reason for the question or action. In Internal attribution, a person always wants to show him as much as positive. Internal attributions are driven by motives and emotional attitudes of an individual.

**Example**

Jim scored the highest mark in the class. He believes that he got marks because he worked hard and because he has the ability to score good marks. He attributes the causes in the factors which are internal. Thus, his confidence level increases and he tends to score higher next time also.

**2. External Attribution**

A person wants to understand the world through events which happens around him and a person seeks a reason for that particular event by using external events.

**Example**

Hendry Scored the lowest mark and he believes that it because of the pen. He even believes that the person who checked his answer sheet was not in a good mood. He attributes the causes of this failure in external factors.

**Conclusion**

Fritz Heider thinking influenced generations of psychologists. He is one of the most cited social scientists of all time. There are several theories and models are developed based on the attribution theory. This theory employs various methods for the measurement and categorization of attributions. Even if it was developed by Heider the main framework of the theory was modeled by Bernard Weiner and Harold Kelley.

# Constructivism

Constructivism is a scientific theory that attempts to explain why  
some people are more successful in attaining their interpersonal communication goals  
than others. It also makes predictions that people who are more cognitively complex will  
be more successful because of their ability to use rhetorical design logic in sending  
messages. (Delia et al., 1982)

Constructivism is a communication theory, which is focused on the identification of individual differences among people’s ability to communicate effectively in social situations (Griffin, 2012). Jesse Delia is credited for the development of constructivism theory. Delia’s theory of constructivism implies there is a difference between people who are interpersonally successful, as opposed to those who are not. Delia’s theory of constructivism is focused on being able to better understand the differences among individuals who communicate more effectively in social situations.

Constructivism is a communication theory that seeks to explain individual differences in people’s ability to communicate skillfully in social situations. You probably don’t need to be convinced that some people are better at understanding, attracting, persuading, informing, comforting, or entertaining others with whom they talk. In fact, you may be taking communication courses so that you can become more adept at reaching these communication goals. Although some might suspect that communication success is simply a matter of becoming more assertive or outgoing, Jesse Delia believes that there is a crucial behind-the-eyes difference in people who are interpersonally effective. His theory of constructivism offers a cognitive explanation for communication competence.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISE**

Define the difference between attribution theory and constructivism theory by your own words.

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# Chapter Three: Messages

**Introduction**

**Dear Learner:** Welcome to the third chapter of the module! This chapter deals with message-related theories. The first part talks about information theory. The next section discusses the coordinated management of meaning theory and its assumption. Last section deals expectancy violation theory and its assumptions.

**Objectives of the Chapter**

Upon of completion of this chapter, you will be able to:

* Discuss information theory
* Explain coordinated management of meaning
* Explicate non-verbal violation expectancy theory

# Information Theory

Information theory studies the quantification, storage, and communication of information. It was originally proposed by Claude Shannon in 1948 to find fundamental limits on signal processing and communication operations such as data compression, in a landmark paper entitled "A Mathematical Theory of Communication".

One of the most fundamental theory in the twentieth century is the Shannon-Weaver model which is also known as an Information Theory. This theory is very important for the theory of mass communication but at the same time, it is also significant for electronic communication in the world IT. This photo shows us the computer brain and the human brain almost works the same according to information theory.

First, if we look at the human on the authority of the information process; the source which can be a person or a corporation is transmitted the message by helping the tool. This tool that can be tv channel transmitter antenna or vocal cord. The message which is sent by the first resource becomes the signal. And this signal must be true for the realization of the process.

Because in the other process, the receiver tool decodes this signal and the decoded code becomes a new message. In the end, the message is delivered to the target. In this picture, we can adapt this stencil to the information theory.

In Information Theory (Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver), it is assumed that noise is the enemy of information. Therefore, it is proposed that noise reduces information-carrying capacity. This can be tested, for example, by having someone read a text to another in a quiet library, in a crowded coffee shop, and at a rock concert, and then quizzing them on their understanding of the text. The theory predicts that as the number of environmental noise increases so the amount of information transmitted will be reduced. Indeed, it is highly likely that the person hearing the text spoken in the library will have received and understood more of the information contained in the text than the person hearing it at the rock concert. This ability to predict behavior/outcomes – based on the assumptions and axioms – which can then be tested, is a characteristic of all theories.

# Coordinated Management of Meaning

Theorists in Coordinated Management of Meaning believe that in conversation, people co-create meaning by attaining some coherence and coordination. Coherence occurs when stories are told, and coordination exists when stories are lived. CMM focuses on the relationship between an individual and his or her society. Through a hierarchical structure, individuals come to organize the meaning of literally hundreds of messages received throughout a day.

The coordinated management of meaning, or CMM, is a practical theory about resources and practices for making communicating more understandable and more able to create better social worlds. CMM theory is premised on what is called a “communication perspective” that orients the practitioner or researcher to look directly at the patterns of communicating, rather than looking through communication to its outcomes.

The Coordinated Management of Meaning theorizes communication as a process that allows us to create and manage social reality. As such, this theory describes how we as communicators make sense of our world, or create meaning. Meaning can be understood to exist in a hierarchy, depending on the sources of that meaning. Those sources include:

1. **raw sensory data** -- the inputs to your eyes and ears, the visual and auditory stimuli you will interpret to see images and hear sounds;
2. **content** -- interpreted stimuli, where the words are spoken is understood by what they refer to;
3. **speech acts** -- content takes on more meaning when it is further interpreted as belonging to a speaker who has specific communication styles, relationships with the listener, and intentions;
4. **episodes** -- in common terms, you may think of this as the context of the conversation or discourse where when you understand the context you understand what the speaker thinks he or she is doing;
5. **master contracts** -- these define the relationships the communicating participants, or what each can expect of the other in a specific episode;
6. **life scripts** -- the set of episodes a person expects they will participate in; and
7. **cultural patterns** -- culturally created set of rules that govern what we understand to be normal communication in a given episode.

Persons use two types of rules to coordinate the management of meaning among those seven levels of meaning. First, we use constitutive rules to help understand how meaning at one level determines to mean at another level. Second, we use regulative rules to help us regulate what we say so that we stay within what we consider to be normal communication in a given episode.

**Assumptions of Coordinated Management of Meaning**

CMM focuses on the self and its relationship to others; it examines how an individual assigns meaning to a message. The theory is especially important because it focuses on the relationship between an individual and his or her society (Philipsen, 1995). Referring back to the theater metaphor, consider the fact that all actors must be able to improvise—using their personal repertoire of acting experiences—as well as reference the scripts that they bring into the drama.

Human beings, therefore, are capable of creating and interpreting meaning. There are a few other assumptions as well:

• Human beings live in communication.

• Human beings co-create social reality.

• Information transactions depend on personal and interpersonal meaning.

The first assumption of CMM points to the centrality of communication. That is, human beings live in communication. Communication is, as noted in Chapter 1, a dynamic process that is more than talk; communication, according to CMM, is also a way of creating and doing things (Pearce, 2007). Pearce (1989) claims that “communication is, and always has been, far more central to whatever it means to be a human being that had ever been supposed” (p. 3).

That is, we live in communication. In adopting this claim, Pearce rejects traditional models of the communication process such as the linear model to which we referred in Chapter 1. Rather, CMM theorists propose a counterintuitive orientation: They believe that social situations are created by interactions.

Because individuals create their conversational reality, each interaction has the potential to be unique. This perspective requires CMM adherents to cast aside their preexisting views of what it means to be a communicator. Further, CMM theorists call for a reexamination of how individuals view communication because “Western intellectual history has tended to use communication as if it were an odorless, colorless, tasteless vehicle of thought and expression” (Pearce, 1989, p. 17). Pearce and Cronen contend that communication must be reconfigured and contextualized in order to begin to understand human behavior. When researchers begin this journey of redefinition, they start investigating the consequences of communication, not the behaviors or variables that accompany the communication process (Cronen, 1995a).

To illustrate this assumption, consider our opening story. Although Jessie and Ben believe that they have covered most of the details associated with merging their families, many more issues will appear as the families come together. Family members will create new realities for themselves, and these realities will be based on communication. Conversations will frequently be determined by what the family knows as well as what the family does not know. That is, parents and children will work through unexpected as well as expected joys and sorrows. Like many families in their situation, they may stumble upon areas they never considered. The two families will be working from different sets of conversation rules and therefore may arrive at very different conclusions as they discuss important issues.

The second assumption of CMM is that human beings co-create a social reality. Although we implied this assumption earlier, it merits delineation. The belief that people in conversations co-construct their social reality is called **social constructionism.** Pearce (2007) is clear in his social construction advocacy. He observes: “Rather than ‘What did you mean by that?’ the relevant questions are ‘What are we making together?’ ‘How are we making it?’ and ‘How can we make better social worlds?’” (pp. 30–31).

These social worlds require an understanding of **social reality,** which refers to a person’s beliefs about how meaning and action fit within his or her interpersonal encounters. When two people engage in a conversation, they each come with a host of past conversational experiences from previous social realities. Current conversations, however, elicit new realities because two people are arriving at the conversation from different vantage points. In this way, two people co-create a new social reality.

Sometimes, these communication experiences are smooth; at other times they are cumbersome. As Gerry Philipsen (1995) concludes, “Many interactions are more messy than clean and more awkward than elegant” (p. 19). Our opening example of Jessie and Ben illustrates this assumption. Although Jessie and Ben have been dating for some time and are preparing for their wedding,

CMM theorists believe that they will continue to co-create a new social reality. For instance, the two will have to manage the issue of Jessie’s daughters’ reluctance to support the marriage. As Jessie and Ben discuss the matter in front of the fireplace, regardless of how they have previously discussed it, they create a new social reality. Perhaps some new issues will emerge—child support, Jessie’s job, the age of the children, Jessie’s ex-spouse, and so forth—or perhaps Jessie, Ben, or both will adopt new perspectives on their future family makeup. In any event, the social reality that the two experience will be a shared reality.

The third assumption guiding CMM relates to the manner in which people control conversations. Specifically, information transactions depend on personal and interpersonal meaning, as distinguished by Donald Cushman and Gordon Whiting (1972).

**Personal meaning** is defined as the meaning achieved when a person interacts with another and brings into the interaction his or her unique experiences. Cushman and Whiting suggest that personal meaning is derived from the experiences people have with one another, and yet “it is improbable that two individuals will interpret the same experience in a similar manner. . . and equally improbable that they would select the same symbolic patterns to represent the experience” (p. 220). Personal meaning helps people in discovery; that is, it not only allows us to discover information about ourselves but also aids in our discovery about other people.

When two people agree on each other’s interpretation, they are said to achieve **interpersonal meaning.** Cushman and Whiting (1972) argue that interpersonal meaning can be understood within a variety of contexts, including families, small groups, and organizations. They note that interpersonal meaning is co-constructed by the participants. Achieving interpersonal meaning may take some time because relationships are complex and deal with multiple communication issues.

A family, for example, may be challenged with financial problems one day, child-raising concerns the next, and elderly care the next. Each of these scenarios may require family members to engage in unique communication pertaining to that particular family episode.

Personal and interpersonal meanings are achieved in conversations, frequently without much thought. Perceptive individuals recognize that they can not engage in specialized personal meaning without explaining themselves to others.

Cushman and Whiting tell us that interpersonal meaning must often be negotiated so that rules of meanings move from “in-house usage” to “standardized usage.” Sharing meaning for particular symbols, however, is complicated by the fact that the meaning of many symbols is left unstated. For instance, consider a physician specializing in AIDS who discusses recent drug therapies with a group of college students. As the physician discusses AIDS, she must talk in laypersons’ terms so that audience members will understand. However, despite honest efforts at avoiding jargon, it may be nearly impossible to avoid it completely. That is, as much as the physician tries, time may not permit her to fully explain the meaning of all specialized terms.

These three assumptions form a backdrop for discussing the Coordinated Management of Meaning. As these assumptions indicate, the theory rests primarily on the concepts of communication, social reality, and meaning. In addition, we can better understand the theory by examining a number of other issues in detail. Among these issues is the manner in which meaning is categorized.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1.What is the Coordinate Management of Meaning?

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2. Discuss the assemptions of CMM.

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# Non-Verbal Expectancy Violation

Expectancy Violations Theory is concerned primarly with the structure of non-verbal messages. It asserts that communicative norms are norms are violated, the violation may be perceived either favorably or unfavorably, depending on the perception the receiver has of the violator. Violating another’s expectations is a strategy that may be used rather than conforming to another’s expectations.

Expectancy violations theory predicts and explains the effects of nonverbal behavior violations on interpersonal communication outcomes such as attraction, credibility, persuasion, and smooth interactions. Human interactions are strongly governed by expectations which, if violated, are arousing and trigger an appraisal process that may be moderated by the rewardingness of the violator. Violation interpretations and evaluations determine whether they are positive or negative violations. Positive violations are predicted to produce more favorable outcomes, and negative violations less favorable outcomes, than positive and negative confirmations respectively.

Many of the theory's propositions have been supported empirically. Some contrary findings have led to a revision of the theory. The theory has also been expanded to several kinds of nonverbal violations, including personal space, eye contact, posture, touch, involvement, and immediacy violations. The theory also spawned the investigation of the meanings associated with violations and the kinds of arousal that violations provoke.

Expectancy violations theory (EVT; Burgoon, 1993; Burgoon & Jones, 1976) is an interpersonal communication theory that makes the counterintuitive claim that violations of expectations are sometimes preferable to confirmations of expectations. It also distinguishes between positive and negative violations. Whereas most advice for communicators is to avoid violations of expectations, EVT proposes that positive violations can produce desirable results.

**Assumptions of Expectancy Violations Theory**

Expectancy Violations Theory is rooted in how messages are presented to others and the kinds of behaviors others undertake during a conversation. In addition, three assumptions guide the theory:

• Expectancies drive human interaction.

• Expectancies for human behavior are learned.

• People make predictions about nonverbal behavior.

The first assumption states that people carry expectancies in their interactions with others. In other words, expectancies drive human interaction. **Expectancies** can be defined as the cognitions and behaviors anticipated and prescribed in a conversation with another person. Expectancies, therefore, necessarily include individuals’ nonverbal and verbal behavior.

In her early writings of EVT, Burgoon (1978) notes that people do not view others’ behaviors as random; rather, they have various expectations of how others should think and behave. Reviewing the research by Burgoon and her associates, Tim Levine and his colleagues (2000) suggest that expectancies are a result of social norms, stereotypes, hearsay, and the idiosyncrasies of communicators. Consider, for instance, our story of Margie Russo and Janet Mueller.

If you were the interviewer, what sort of expectations would you have for the nonverbal and verbal behavior of the interviewee? Many people conducting the interview would certainly expect a specific level of confidence, manifested by a warm handshake, a give-and-take conversational flow, and active listening skills.

Interviewees would also be expected to keep a reasonable distance from the interviewer during the interview process. Many people in the United States do not want people whom they do not know to stand either too close or too far away from them. Whether it is in an interview situation or even a discussion between two people who have a prior relationship, Burgoon and other EVT writers argue that people enter interactions with a number of expectations about how a message should be delivered and how the messenger should deliver it.

Judee Burgoon and Jerold Hale (1988) contend that two types of expectations exist: pre-interactional and interactional. **Pre-interactional expectations** include the types of interactional knowledge and skills the communicator possesses before he or she enters a conversation. People do not always understand what it takes to enter and maintain a conversation. Some conversationalists may be very argumentative, for example, and others may be extremely passive. Most people do not expect such extreme behavior in their dialogues with others.

**Interactional expectations** pertain to an individual’s ability to carry out the interaction itself. Most people expect others to maintain appropriate conversational distance. In addition, in communicating with others, listening behaviors such as prolonged eye contact are frequently expected. These and a host of other behaviors are important to consider when examining the role of expectations before and during an interaction.

Of course, depending on the cultural background of communicators, these behaviors can vary tremendously from one person to another. In addition, whether our expectations are met will usually be influenced by the culture in which we live and by whether we have internalized cultural patterns for conversation expectations.

This leads us to our second assumption of EVT—that people learn their expectations from both the culture at large and the individuals in that culture. For instance, the U.S. culture teaches that a professor-student relationship is underscored by professional respect. Although not explicitly stated in most college classrooms, professors have more social status than students, and therefore certain expectations exist in their relationships with their students.

For instance, we expect teachers to be knowledgeable about the subject matter, to present it to students in a clear manner, and to be available if students are concerned or confused about a topic. We also expect professors to recognize, acknowledge, and affirm students in the classroom who offer their thoughts (Schrodt et al., 2008). The teacher-student relationship is just one example of culture teaching its citizens that expectations exist in a particular relationship.

Most discussions between teachers and students, therefore, are laden with cultural expectations of how the two should relate to each other. A number of societal institutions (the family, the media, business and industry, and so forth) are central in pre-scribing what cultural patterns to follow. These at-large cultural prescriptions ultimately may be followed by individuals in conversation with each other.

Individuals within a culture are also influential in communicating expectations. Burgoon and Hale (1988) remark that differences based on our prior knowledge of others, our relational history with them, and our observations are important to consider. For instance, Janet Mueller’s past experiences with prospective employees influence how she perceives an interaction and her expectations of job candidates in an interview (relational history). In addition, expectations result from our observations. In one family, for instance, standing very close to one another is a family norm, and yet this norm is not shared in other families. Interesting scenarios occur in conversations between individuals with different norms; expectations for conversational distance vary and may influence perceptions of the interaction or to have other consequences.

The third assumption pertains to the predictions people make about non-verbal communication. Later in this chapter, we note that EVT theorists have applied the notion of expectancies to verbal behavior. Nonetheless, the original statement of EVT related specifically to nonverbal behavior. To this end, it’s important to point out a belief inherent in the theory: People make predictions about another’s nonverbal behavior.

In later writings of EVT, Judee Burgoon and Joseph Walther (1990) expanded the original understanding of EVT via personal space to other areas of nonverbal communication, including touch and posture. They suggest that the attractiveness of another influences the evaluation of expectancies. In conversations, people do not simply attend to what another is saying. As you will learn in this chapter, nonverbal behavior affects the conversation, and this behavior prompts others to make predictions.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What is Expectancy Violation Theory?

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2.Explain briefly about the core assumptions of Expectancy Violation Theory.

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# Chapter Four: Interpersonal Communication Theories

**Introduction**

**Dear Learner**: Welcome to the fourth chapter! This chapter namely discusses interpersonal communication theories. The first section of the chapter explains social penetration theory and its assumptions. The second of the chapter deals with uncertainty reduction theory with its assumptions. The next part of the chapter talks about the meaning of social exchange theory and its assumptions. The other part elucidates about social judgment theory, and the final section discusses cognitive dissonance theory and its assumptions.

**Objectives of the Chapter**

Upon completion of this chapter, we will be able to:

* Define Social Penetration Theory
* Explain the Uncertainty Reduction Theory
* Describe Social Exchange Theory
* Discuss Social Judgement Theory
* Define Cognitive Dissonance Theory

# 4.1. **Social Penetration Theory**

This theory maintains that interpersonal relationships evolve in some gradual and predictable fashion. Penetration theorists believe that self-disclosure is the primary way that superficial relationships progress to intimate relationships. Although self-disclosure can lead to more intimate relationships, it can also leave one or more persons vulnerable.

To understand the relational closeness between two people, Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor (1973) conceptualized Social Penetration Theory (SPT). The two conducted extensive study in the area of social bonding among various types of couples. Their theory illustrates a pattern of relationship development, a process that they identified as social penetration.

**Social penetration** refers to a process of relationship bonding whereby individuals move from superficial communication to more intimate communication.

According to Altman and Taylor, intimacy involves more than physical intimacy; other dimensions of intimacy include intellectual and emotional, and the extent to which a couple of share activities (West & Turner, 2009).

The social penetration process, therefore, necessarily includes verbal behaviors (the words we use), nonverbal behaviors (our body posture, the extent to which we smile, and so forth), and environmentally oriented behaviors (the space between communicators, the physical objects present in the environment, and so forth).

Altman and Taylor (1973) believe that people’s relationships vary tremendously in their social penetration. From husband–wife to supervisor-employee to golf partners to physician-patient, the theorists conclude that relationships “involve different levels of intimacy of exchange or degree of social penetration” (p. 3).

The authors note that relationships follow some particular **trajectory** or pathway to closeness. Furthermore, they contend that relationships are somewhat organized and predictable in their development. Because relationships are critical and “lie at the heart of our humanness” (Rogers & Escudero, 2004, p. 3).

Social Penetration theorists attempt to unravel the simultaneous nature of relational complexity and predictability. And, although many individuals may have established online relationships, Altman and Taylor did not conceptualize this development in their writing. The opening story of Jason LaSalle and his arranged date illustrates a central feature of Social Penetration Theory (SPT). The only way for Jason and Elise to understand each other is for them to engage in personal conversations; such discussion requires each sharing personal bits of information.

To begin, we outline several assumptions of Social Penetration Theory. We then identify the catalyst for the theory.

**Assumptions of Social Penetration Theory**

Social Penetration Theory (called a “stage theory” by Mongeau & Henningsen, 2008), has enjoyed widespread acceptance by a number of scholars in the communication discipline. Part of the reason for the theory’s appeal is its straightforward approach to relationship development. Although we alluded to some assumptions earlier, we will explore the following assumptions that guide SPT:

• Relationships progress from nonintimate to intimate.

• Relational development is generally systematic and predictable.

• Relational development includes depenetration and dissolution.

• Self-disclosure is at the core of relationship development.

First, relational communication between people begins at a rather superficial level and moves along a continuum to a more intimate level. On their date arranged by Kayla, Jason and Elise no doubt talked about trivial issues related to being single parents. They probably shared how difficult it is to have enough time in the day to do everything, but they probably did not express how desperate they feel at 3 A.M. when they awake from a nightmare, for example. These initial conversations at first may appear unimportant, but as Jason discovers, such conversations allow an individual to size up the other and provide the opportunity for the early stages of relational development. There is little doubt that Jason feels awkward, but this awkwardness can pass. With time, relationships have the opportunity to become intimate.

Not all relationships fall into the extremes of nonintimate or intimate. In fact, many of our relationships are somewhere in between these two poles. Often, we may want only a moderately close relationship. For instance, we may want a relationship with a co-worker to remain sufficiently distant so that we do not know what goes on in her house each night or how much money she has in the bank. Yet we need to know enough personal information to have a sense of whether she can complete her part of a team project.

The second assumption of Social Penetration Theory pertains to predictability. Specifically, Social Penetration theorists argue that relationships progress fairly systematically and predictably. Some people may have difficulty with this claim. After all, relationships—like the communication process—are dynamic and ever-changing, but even dynamic relationships follow some acceptable standard and pattern of development.

To better understand this assumption, again consider Jason LaSalle. Without knowing all the specifics of his situation, we could figure out that if he pursues a relationship with Elise, he will have to work through his emotions about Miranda. In addition, he must inevitably reconcile how their families might merge if the relationship progresses into more intimacy. We could probably predict that the relationship will move slowly at first while both Jason and Elise work out their feelings and emotions.

These projections are grounded in the second assumption of the theory: Relationships generally move in an organized and predictable manner. Although we may not know precisely the direction of a relationship or be able to predict its exact future, social penetration processes are rather organized and predictable.

We can be fairly sure, for instance, that Jason and Elise will not introduce each other to important people in their families before they date a few more times. We would also expect that neither would declare his or her love for the other before they exchanged more intimate information. Of course, a number of other events and variables (time, personality, and so forth) affect the way relationships progress and what we can predict along the way. As Altman and Taylor (1973) conclude, “People seem to possess very sensitive tuning mechanisms which enable them to program carefully their interpersonal relationships” (p. 8).

The third assumption of SPT pertains to the notion that relational development includes depenetration and dissolution. At first, this may sound a bit peculiar. Thus far, we have explored the coming together of a relationship. Yet relationships do fall apart, or **depenetrate** and this depenetration can lead to relationship dissolution. Elise, for example, may be unprepared for Jason’s past and may wish to depenetrate and ultimately dissolve the relationship.

The final assumption contends that self-disclosure is at the core of relationship development. **Self-disclosure** can be generally defined as the purposeful process of revealing information about yourself to others. Usually, the information that makes up self-disclosure is of a significant nature. For instance, revealing that you like to play the piano may not be all that important; revealing a more personal piece of information, such as that you are a practicing Catholic and are pro-life, may significantly influence the evolution of a relationship.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What is Social Penetration Theory?

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2. Explain briefly about the core assamptions of Socail Penetration Theory.

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# 4.2. Uncertainly Reduction Theory

The theory was developed, like other interpersonal theories before it (Heider, 1958), with the goal of allowing the communicator the ability to predict and explain initial interactions.

Sometimes called Initial Interaction Theory, Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) was originated by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese in 1975. It continues to be an important theory, because, as Leanne Knobloch (2008) states, “everyday life is infused with uncertainty” (p. 133). Berger and Calabrese’s goal in constructing this theory was to explain how communication is used to reduce uncertainties between strangers engaging in their first conversation together.

Berger and Calabrese believe that when strangers first meet, they are primarily concerned with increasing predictability in an effort to make sense out of their communication experience.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that when strangers meet, their primary focus is on reducing their levels of uncertainty in the situation. Their levels of uncertainty are located in both behavioral and cognitive realms. That is, they may be unsure of how to behave (or how the other person will behave), and they may also be unsure what they think of the other and what the other person thinks of them. Further, people’s uncertainty is both an individual level and relational level. People are highly motivated to use communication to reduce their uncertainty according to this theory.

**Prediction** can be defined as the ability to forecast the behavioral options likely to be chosen from a range of possible options available to oneself or to a relational partner. **Explanation** refers to attempts to interpret the meaning of past actions in a relationship. These two concept predictions and explanation—make up the two primary subprocesses of uncertainty reduction.

**Assumptions of Uncertainty Reduction Theory**

As we have mentioned in earlier chapters, theories are frequently grounded in assumptions that reflect the worldview of the theorists. Uncertainty Reduction Theory is no exception. The following assumptions frame this theory:

* People experience uncertainty in interpersonal settings.
* Uncertainty is an aversive state, generating cognitive stress.
* When strangers meet, their primary concern is to reduce their uncertainty or to increase predictability.
* Interpersonal communication is a developmental process that occurs through stages.
* Interpersonal communication is the primary means of uncertainty reduction.
* The quantity and nature of the information that people share change through time.
* It is possible to predict people’s behavior in a lawlike fashion.

We will briefly address each assumption. First, in a number of interpersonal settings, people feel uncertainty. Because differing expectations exist for interpersonal occasions, it is reasonable to conclude that people are uncertain or even nervous about meeting others. As Berger and Calabrese (1975) state, “When persons are unable to make sense out of their environment, they usually become anxious” (p. 106).

Consider Malcolm’s anxiety, for instance, as he meets Edie after class. Berger and Calabrese contend that he experiences uncertainty when meeting Edie, a classmate to whom he is attracted. Although there are a great many cues in the environment that can help Malcolm make sense out of his interaction with Edie, there are complicating factors as well. For example, Malcolm may have noticed Edie hurrying to leave the room. There may be several alternative explanations for this behavior, including another class that is a distance away, a general predisposition toward hurrying, having to go to the bathroom, feeling faint and wanting fresh air, wanting to avoid meeting Malcolm at the door, and so forth. Given all these alternatives, it is likely that Malcolm (or anyone in his situation) feels uncertain about how to interpret Edie’s behavior.

The second assumption suggests that uncertainty is an aversive state. In other words, it takes a great deal of emotional and psychological energy to remain uncertain. When Miguel met his new boss, Sandra, for the first time he was highly uncertain. He’d never worked for a woman before or for someone his own age, as Sandra was. He had a million questions that occupied his cognitive and psychological energy. The longer he worked for Sandra, the more he resolved his uncertainty. Miguel was free, then, to think about other things beyond his questions about what Sandra might do or say and how he should respond.

The next assumption underlying URT advances the proposition that when strangers meet, two concerns are important: reducing uncertainty and increasing predictability. At first glance, this may sound commonsensical, yet, as Berger (1995) concludes, “There is always the possibility that one’s conversational partner will respond unconventionally to even the most routine message” (pp. 2–3).

Uncertainty Reduction Theory suggests that these concerns are often dealt with through information seeking. Information seeking usually takes the form of asking questions in order to gain some predictability. Politicians often ask questions when meeting their constituents. They spend time with the voters in their district and ask them questions to gain a sense of their needs. This process can be quite engaging, and many people do this unconsciously.

The fourth assumption of URT suggests that interpersonal communication is a process involving developmental stages. According to Berger and Calabrese, generally speaking, most people begin interaction in an **entry phase,** defined as the beginning stage of interaction between strangers. The entry phase is guided by implicit and explicit rules and norms, such as responding in kind when someone says, “Hi! How are you doing?”

Individuals then enter the second stage, called the **personal phase,** or the stage where the interactants start to communicate more spontaneously and to reveal more idiosyncratic information. The personal phase can occur during an initial encounter, but it is more likely to begin after repeated interactions.

The third stage, the **exit phase,** refers to the stage during which individuals make decisions about whether they wish to continue interacting with this partner in the future. Although all people do not enter a phase in the same manner or stay in a phase for a similar amount of time, Berger and Calabrese believe that a universal framework exists that explains how interpersonal communication shapes and reflects the development of interpersonal relationships.

The fifth assumption states that interpersonal communication is the primary means of uncertainty reduction. Because we have identified interpersonal communication as the focus of URT, this assumption should come as no surprise. Uncertainty Reduction Theory draws on the interpersonal context that we discussed in Chapter 2: You may recall that interpersonal communication requires a host of preconditions—among them listening skills, nonverbal response cues, and a shared language.

Most of us presume that these and other conditions are present in our conversations, yet Berger (1995) warns that there are a number of situations where “these preconditions for carrying out face-to-face encounters may not be met” (p. 4). For instance, he notes the inherent challenges in communicating with hearing-impaired or visually impaired interactants who do not have full sensory capabilities. Or you may have had some experience communicating with someone who does not speak your language. Challenges such as these affect the uncertainty reduction process and relational development.

The next assumption underscores the nature of time. It also focuses on the fact that interpersonal communication is developmental. Uncertainty reduction theorists believe that initial interactions are key elements in the developmental process.

The final assumption indicates that people’s behavior can be predicted in a lawlike fashion. One of the guidelines we reviewed was covering law, which assumes that human behavior is regulated by generalizable principles that function in a law-like manner. Although there may be some exceptions, in general people behave in accordance with these laws. The goal of a covering law theory is to lay out the laws that will explain how we communicate. As you might imagine, covering law theories have a difficult task. Although some aspects of the natural world may operate under laws, the social world is much more variable. That is why covering laws in social science are called “lawlike.” A pattern is outlined, but the deterministic notion implied with natural laws is relaxed a bit. Still, even to approach the goal of lawlike statements is daunting.

Thus, theories like URT begin with what may seem like commonsense observations in order to establish regularities that govern people’s behaviors. Covering law theories are constructed to move from statements that are presumed to be true (or axioms) to statements that are derived from these truisms

(or theorems).

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What is the Uncertainty Reductiion Theory about?

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2. Discuss the assemptions of URT.

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# 4.3. Social Exchange Theory

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is based on the notion that people think about their relationships in economic terms. People tally up the costs of being in a relationship and compare them to the rewards that are offered by being in that relationship.

Social Exchange theorists argue that people assess their relationships in terms of costs and rewards (Stafford, 2008). All relationships require some time and effort on the part of their participants. When friends spend time with each other, which they must do to maintain the relationship, they are unable to do other things with that time, so in that sense, the time spent is a cost. Friends may need attention at inopportune times, and then the cost is magnified.

For instance, if you had to finish a term paper and your best friend just broke up with her boyfriend and needed to talk to you, you can see how the friendship would cost you something in terms of time. Yet relationships provide us with rewards, or positives, too. Families, friends, and loved ones generally give us a sense of acceptance, support, and companionship. Some friends open doors for us or provide us with status just by being with us. Friends and families keep us from feeling lonely and isolated. Some friends teach us helpful lessons.

The Social Exchange perspective argues that people calculate the overall worth of a particular relationship by subtracting its costs from the rewards it provides (Monge & Contractor, 2003): worth rewards costs Positive relationships are those whose worth is a positive number; that is, the rewards are greater than the costs. Relationships, where the worth is a negative number (the costs exceed the rewards), tend to be negative for the participants.

**Assumptions of Social Exchange Theory**

All Social Exchange theories are built upon several assumptions about human nature and the nature of relationships. Some of these assumptions should be clear to you after our introductory comments. Because Social Exchange Theory is based on a metaphor of economic exchange, many of these assumptions flow from the notion that people view life as a marketplace. In addition, Thibaut and Kelley base their theory on two conceptualizations: one that focuses on the nature of individuals and one that describes the relationships between two people. They look to drive reduction, an internal motivator, to understand individuals and to gaming principles to understand relationships between people.

Thus, the assumptions they make also fall into these two categories. The assumptions that Social Exchange Theory makes about human nature include the following:

* Humans seek rewards and avoid punishments.
* Humans are rational beings.
* The standards that humans use to evaluate costs and rewards vary over time and from person to person.

The assumptions Social Exchange Theory makes about the nature of relationships include the following:

• Relationships are interdependent.

• Relational life is a process.

We will look at each of these assumptions in turn.

The notion that humans seek rewards and avoid punishment is consistent with the conceptualization of drive reduction (Roloff, 1981). This approach assumes that people’s behaviors are motivated by some internal drive mechanism. When people feel this drive, they are motivated to reduce it, and the process of doing so is a pleasurable one. If George feels thirsty, he is driven to reduce that feeling by getting a drink. This whole process is rewarding and, thus, “To be rewarded means that a person had undergone drive reduction or need fulfillment” (p. 45).

The second assumption—that humans are rational—is critical to Social Exchange Theory. The theory rests on the notion that within the limits of the information that is available to them, people will calculate the costs and rewards of a given situation and guide their behaviors accordingly. This also includes the possibility that faced with no rewarding choice, people will choose the least costly alternative. In the case of LaTasha and Meredith, it is costly to continue their friendship in the face of all the stress and family objections. Yet both young women may believe that it is less costly than ending their friendship and denying themselves the support and affection that they have shared for the past nine years.

James White and David Klein (2002) point out that assuming rationality is not the same as saying that people engage in rationalization. By assuming that people are rational beings, Social Exchange Theory asserts that people use rational thinking to make choices. But when we rationalize, we “attempt to provide an apparently rational justification for [our] behavior after the behavior occurred” (p. 37). Thus, rationalizing provides a fabricated attempt to make a choice look rational after the fact. This distinction becomes important when we discuss some of the criticisms of Social Exchange Theory at the end of this chapter.

The third assumption—that the standards people use to evaluate costs and rewards vary over time and from person to person—suggests that the theory must take diversity into consideration. No one standard can be applied to everyone to determine what is a cost and what is a reward. Thus, LaTasha may grow to see the relationship as more costly than Meredith does (or vice versa) as their standards change over time. However, Social Exchange Theory is a lawlike theory, as we described, because SET claims that although individuals may differ in their definition of rewards, the first assumption is still true for all people: We are motivated to maximize our profits and rewards while minimizing our losses and costs (Molm, 2001).

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What is the Social Exchange Theory about?

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2.Discuss the assemptions of Social Exchange Theory.

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# Social Judgment Theory

Social judgment theory says that at the instant of perception, people compare messages to their present point of view.  Individuals’ opinions are not adequately represented as points along a continuum because degrees of tolerance around their positions must also be considered. Muzafer Sherif established three zones of attitudes. **These are:** the atTitude of acceptance, the latitude of rejection, The latitude of non-commitment. A description of a person’s attitude structure must include the location and width of each interrelated latitude.

Ego-involvement: How much do you care? Ego-involvement refers to the importance of an issue to an individual. The favored position anchors all other thoughts about the topic. High ego-involvement can be defined as membership in a group with a known stand. Three features are typical of high ego-involvement. The latitude of noncommitment is nearly nonexistent. The latitude of rejection is wide. People who hold extreme views care deeply. Moving from the cognitive structure of a person’s attitude, attention shifts to the judgment part of the theory.

Judging the message: Contrast and assimilation errors. Social judgment-involvement describes the linkage between ego-involvement and perception.  Contrast occurs when one perceives a message within the latitude of rejection as being more discrepant than it actually is from the anchor point. This perceptual distortion leads to polarization of ideas. Assimilation, the opposite of contrast, occurs when one perceives a message within the latitude of acceptance as being less discrepant than it actually is from the anchor point. Although Sherif is unclear as to how people judge messages that fall within the latitude of noncommitment, most interpreters favor a neutral reading.

Discrepancy and attitude change. If individuals judge a new message to fall within their latitude of acceptance, they adjust their attitude to accommodate it. The persuasive effect will be positive but partial. The greater the discrepancy, the more individuals adjust their attitudes.

The most persuasive message is the one that is most discrepant from the listener’s position, yet still falls within his or her latitude of acceptance or latitude of noncommitment. If individuals judge a new message to be within their latitude of rejection, they may adjust their attitude away from it.

For individuals with high ego-involvement and broad latitudes of rejection, most messages that are aimed to persuade them and that fall within their latitudes of rejection have an effect opposite of what the communicator intended. This boomerang effect suggests that individuals are often driven, rather than drawn, to the positions they occupy.

Sherif’s approach is quite automatic. He reduced the interpersonal influence on the issue of the distance between the message and the hearer’s position. Volition exists only in the choice of messages available to the persuader.

Practical advice for the Persuader. For maximum influence, select a message right on the edge of the audience’s latitude of acceptance or noncommitment.  Ambiguous messages can sometimes serve better than clarity. Persuasion is a gradual process consisting of small movements. The most dramatic, widespread, and enduring attitude changes involve changes in reference groups with differing values.

Attitudes on sleep, booze, and money: Evidence supporting SJT. Research on the predictions of social judgment theory requires highly ego-involved issues. A highly credible speaker can shrink the listener’s latitude of acceptance. Application of the theory raises ethical problems.

Critique: A theory well within the latitude of acceptance. The theory has practical utility for persuaders. The theory offers specific predictions and explanations about what happens in the mind when a message falls within someone’s latitude of acceptance or rejection. Like all cognitive explanations, social judgment theory assumes a mental structure and process that are beyond sensory observation. While it has not been widely tested empirically, research does support it, validating its claims while proving the theory falsifiable. Despite these reservations, social judgment theory is an elegant, intuitively appealing approach to persuasion.

# Cognitive Dissonance Theory

The Cognitive Dissonance Theory explains the inter-relationships among competing cognitions (beliefs, opinion, attitudes, values and ideas). It applies to all situations involving attitude formation or change, but more relevant in decision making and problem-solving. The theory states that there is a tendency for individuals to seek consistency among their cognitions (i.e., beliefs, opinions). Whenever inconsistency occurs between an individual’s attitudes or behavior (dissonance), something must change to eliminate the dissonance. In the case of a discrepancy between attitudes and behavior, it is most likely that the attitude will change to accommodate the behavior.

The number of dissonant beliefs and the importance attached to each belief has two factors that affect the strength of the dissonance. And three ways to eliminate dissonance includes;

• Reducing the importance of the dissonant beliefs,

• Adding more consonant beliefs that outweigh the dissonant beliefs,

• Changing the dissonant beliefs so that they are no longer inconsistent.

The basic principles of this theory are summarized as:

* Dissonance results when an individual must choose between attitudes and behavior that are contradictory.
* Dissonance can be eliminated by reducing the importance of conflicting beliefs, acquiring new beliefs that change the balance, or removing the conflicting attitude or behavior.

It means a feeling of discomfort resulting from inconsistent attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors. Cognitive Dissonance Theory argues that the experience of dissonance (or incompatible beliefs and actions) is aversive and people are highly motivated to avoid it. In their efforts to avoid feelings of dissonance, people will avoid hearing views that oppose their own, change their beliefs to match their actions, and seek reassurance after making a difficult decision.

The experience of dissonance—incompatible beliefs and actions or two incompatible beliefs—is unpleasant, and people are highly motivated to avoid it. In their efforts to avoid feelings of dissonance, people will ignore views that oppose their own, change their beliefs to match their actions (or vice versa), and/or seek reassurances after making a difficult decision. Consistency theorists note that there is a lack of balance among your **cognitions,** or ways of knowing, beliefs, judgments, and so forth.

Leon Festinger called this feeling of imbalance **cognitive dissonance;** this is the feeling people have when they “find themselves doing things that don’t fit with what they know, or having opinions that do not fit with other opinions they hold.” This concept forms the core of Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT), a theory that argues that dissonance is an uncomfortable feeling that motivates people to take steps to reduce it (Figure 7.1).

As Roger Brown (1965) notes, the basics of the theory follow rather simple principles: “A state of cognitive dissonance is said to be a state of psychological discomfort or tension which motivates efforts to achieve consonance. Dissonance is the name for disequilibrium and consonance is the name for equilibrium” (p. 584). Further, Brown points out that the theory allows for two elements to have three different relationships with each other: They may be consonant, dissonant, or irrelevant.

**Assumptions of Cognitive Dissonance Theory**

As we have indicated, the Cognitive Dissonance Theory is an account of how beliefs and behavior change attitudes. Its focus is on the effects of inconsistency among cognitions. Our introductory material suggested a number of assumptions that frame CDT. Four assumptions basic to the theory include:

• Human beings desire consistency in their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors.

• Dissonance is created by psychological inconsistencies.

• Dissonance is an aversive state that drives people to actions with measurable effects.

•Dissonance motivates efforts to achieve consonance and efforts toward dissonance reduction.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory suggests that people do not enjoy inconsistencies in their thoughts and beliefs. Instead, they seek consistency. The first assumption portrays a model of human nature that is concerned with stability and consistency. The second assumption speaks to the kind of consistency that is important to people. The theory is not concerned with strict logical consistency. Rather, it refers to the fact that cognitions must be psychologically inconsistent (as opposed to logically inconsistent) with one another to arouse cognitive dissonance.

The third assumption of the theory suggests that when people experience psychological inconsistencies, the dissonance that is created is aversive. Thus, people do not enjoy being in a state of dissonance; it is an uncomfortable state. Finally, the theory assumes that the arousal generated by dissonance will motivate people to avoid situations that create inconsistencies and strive toward situations that restore consistency. Thus, the picture of human nature that frames the theory is one of seeking psychological consistency as a result of the arousal caused by the aversive state of inconsistent cognitions.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What is cognitive dissonance theory?

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2. Explain briefly about the core assamptions of CDT.

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# Chapter Five: Group, Public, Intercultural Communication Theories

**Introduction**

**Dear Learner:** Welcome to the fifth chapter! This chapter discusses with Interact System Model of Decision Emergence Model, groupthink, rhetorical theory and narrative paradigms. There are questions that have been provided for you at the end of each section.

**Objectives of the Chapter**

At the end of this chapter, you will be able to:

* Figure Interact System Model of Decision Emergence Model of communication
* Discuss the concept of groupthink
* Explain the rhetorical theory
* Elaborate narrative paradigms

# 5.1. Interact System Model of Decision Emergence Model

This model of communication is developed by Aubrey Fisher. Throughout the twentieth century, group members involved in decision-making tasks have been urged to follow educator-philosopher, John Dewey’s pattern of reflective thinking. The six-step logical process parallels a doctor’s approach to treating a patient:

1. Recognize the symptoms of illness.

2. Diagnose the cause of the ailment.

3. Establish criteria for wellness.

4. Consider possible remedies.

5. Test to determine which solutions will work.

6. Implement or prescribe the best solution.

5.2.Groupthink Theory

The groupthink phenomenon occurs when highly cohesive groups fail to consider alternatives that may effectively resolve group dilemmas.

Groupthink theorists contend that group members frequently think similarly and are reluctant to share unpopular or dissimilar ideas with others. When this occurs, groups prematurely make decisions, some of which can have lasting consequences.

Our example of the board of directors at Melton Publishing exemplifies the groupthink phenomenon. The board members are a group of people who apparently get along. The members are essentially connected by their literary backgrounds, making them more predisposed to groupthink. The group is under a deadline to come up with a thoughtful and financially prudent decision about the financial future of the company. As the chapter unfolds, we will tell you more about how this group becomes susceptible to groupthink.

**Assumptions of Groupthink**

Groupthink is a theory associated with small group communication. In fact, emphasizing the importance of small groups, Marshall Scott Poole (1998) argues that the small group should be “THE basic unit of analysis” (p. 94). Janis focuses his work on **problem-solving groups** and **task-oriented groups,** whose main purpose is to make decisions and give policy recommendations. Decision making is a necessary part of these small groups. Other activities of small groups include information sharing, socializing, relating to people and groups external to the group, educating new members, defining roles, and telling stories (Engleberg & Wynn, 2007; Harris & Sherblom, 2008). With that in mind, let’s examine three critical assumptions that guide the theory:

• Conditions in groups promote high cohesiveness.

• Group problem solving is primarily a unified process.

• Groups and group decision making are frequently complex.

The first assumption of Groupthink pertains to a characteristic of group life: cohesiveness. Conditions exist in groups that promote high cohesiveness. Ernest Bormann (1996) observes that group members frequently have a common sentiment or emotional investment, and as a result, they tend to maintain group identity.

This collective thinking usually guarantees that a group will be agreeable and perhaps highly cohesive. What is cohesiveness? You probably have heard of groups sticking together or having a high esprit de corps. This phrase essentially means that the group is cohesive. **Cohesiveness** is defined as the extent to which group members are willing to work together. It is a group’s sense of togetherness. Cohesion arises from a group’s attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior; those members who are highly attracted to other members’ attitudes, values, and behaviors are more likely to be called cohesive.

Cohesion is the glue that keeps a group intact. You may have been a member of a cohesive group, although it can be difficult to measure cohesiveness. For instance, is a group cohesive if all members attend all meetings? If all members communicate at each meeting? If everyone seems amiable and supportive? If group members usually use the word we instead of the word I? All of these? You know if you have been in a cohesive group, but you may not be able to tell others precisely why the group is cohesive.

Our second assumption examines the process of problem-solving in small groups: It is usually a unified undertaking. By this, we mean that people are not predisposed to disrupting decision making in small groups. Members essentially strive to get along. Dennis Gouran (1998) notes that groups are susceptible to **affiliative constraints,** which means that group members hold their input rather than risk rejection.

According to Gouran, when group members to participate, fearing rejection, they are likely “to attach greater importance to the preservation of the group than to the issues under consideration” (p. 100). Group members, then, seem more inclined to follow the leader when decision-making time arrives. Taking these comments into consideration, the board of directors at Melton may simply be a group who recognizes the urgency associated with their financial dilemma. Listening to two board members, Elizabeth and Randy, therefore, is much easier than listening to seven. The two become leaders, and the group members allow them to set the agenda for discussion.

The third assumption underscores the nature of most problem-solving and task-oriented groups to which people belong: They are usually complex. In discussing this assumption, let’s first look at the complexity of small groups and then at the decisions emerging from these groups.

First, small group members must continue to understand the many alternatives available to them and be able to distinguish among these alternatives. In addition, members must not only understand the task at hand but also the people who provide input into the task. Nearly fifty years ago, social psychologist Robert Zajonc (1965) studied what many people have figured out for themselves: The mere presence of others has an effect on us. He offered a very simple principle regarding groups: When others are around us, we become innately aroused, which helps or hinders the performance of tasks.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. What is Groupthink all about?

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2. Discuss the assemptions of Groupthink Theory.

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# 5.2. The Rhetoric Theory

Rhetorical Theory centers on the notion of rhetoric, which Aristotle calls the available means of persuasion. That is, a speaker who is interted in persuading his or her audience should consider three rhetorical proofs: logic (logos), emotion(pathos), and ethics/credibility(ethos). Audiences are key to effective persuasiveness,and rhetorical syllogisms requires audiences to supply missing pieces of a speech, are used in persuasion.

Rhetorical theory is based on the available means of persuasion. That is, a speaker who is interested in persuading his or her audience should consider three rhetorical proofs: logical, emotional, and ethical. Audiences are key to effective persuasion as well. Rhetorical syllogism, requiring audiences to supply missing pieces of a speech, are also used in persuasion.

**Assumptions of the Rhetoric Theory**

To this end, let’s examine two primary assumptions of Rhetorical Theory as proposed by Aristotle. You should be aware that Rhetorical Theory covers a wide range of thinking in the communication field, and so it is nearly impossible to capture all of the beliefs associated with the theory.

Nonetheless, the Aristotelian theory is guided by the following two assumptions:

• Effective public speakers must consider their audience.

• Effective public speakers use a number of proofs in their presentations.

The first assumption underscores the definition of communication that we presented in Chapter 1: Communication is a transactional process. Within a public speaking context, Aristotle suggests that the speaker-audience relationship must be acknowledged. Speakers should not construct or deliver their speeches without considering their audiences. Speakers should, in a sense, become audience-centered. They should think about the audience as a group of individuals with motivations, decisions, and choices and not as some undifferentiated mass of homogeneous people.

The effectiveness of Camille’s speech on drinking and driving derived from her ability to understand her audience. She knew that students, primarily under the age of 25, rarely think about death, and, therefore, her speech prompted them to think about something that they normally would not consider. Camille, like many other public speakers, engaged in **audience analysis,** which is the process of evaluating an audience and its background (such as age, sex, educational level, and so forth) and tailoring one’s speech so that listeners respond as the speaker hopes they will.

Aristotle felt that audiences are crucial to a speaker’s ultimate effectiveness. He observes, “Of the three elements in speech-making—speaker, subject, and person addressed—it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech’s end and object” (cited in Roberts, 1984, p. 2159).

The second assumption underlying Aristotle’s theory pertains to what speakers do in their speech preparation and their speech making. Aristotle’s proofs refer to the means of persuasion, and, for Aristotle, three proofs exist: ethos, pathos, and logos. **Ethos** refers to the perceived character, intelligence, and goodwill of a speaker as they become revealed through his or her speech. Eugene Ryan (1984) notes that ethos is a broad term that refers to the mutual influence that speakers and listeners have on each other.

Aristotle felt that a speech by a trustworthy individual was more persuasive than a speech by an individual whose trust was in question. **Logos** is the logical proof that speakers employ—their arguments and rationalizations. For Aristotle, logos involves using a number of practices, including using logical claims and clear language. To speak in poetic phrases results in a lack of clarity and naturalness. **Pathos** pertains to the emotions that are drawn out of listeners. Aristotle argues that listeners become the instruments of proof when emotion is stirred in them; listeners judge differently when they are influenced by joy, pain, hatred, or fear. Let’s return to our example of Camille to illustrate these three Aristotelian proofs.

**SELF-TEST EXERCISES**

1. Explain the rehetoric theory of Arstotle.

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2. Define the following terms by your expressions

A. Ethos

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B. Logos

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C.Pathos

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# 5.3. Narrative Paradigms

In narrative paradigms, communications are essentially seen as stories. The Narrative Paradigm was proposed by Walter Fisher. According to Fisher (1987) and highlighted in Wikipedia free encyclopedia, all meaningful communication is a form of storytelling or giving a report of events and so human beings experience and comprehend life as a series of ongoing narratives, each with their own conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles, and ends. Individuals are able to distinguish what makes a story legitimate by using what Fisher refers to as narrative rationality. Rationality consists of two factors: coherence and fidelity.

**Coherence**

Fisher defined Coherence as the degree to which a story makes sense structurally. Is the story consistent, with sufficient detail, reliable characters, and free of any major surprises? The ability to judge coherence is learned and improves with experience.

**Fidelity**

Narrative Fidelity is concerned with whether or not the story is true. Fisher establishes five criteria that affect a story’s narrative fidelity.

* questions of fact that examine the values embedded in the story, either explicitly or implicitly
* questions of relevance that consider the connection between the story that is told and the values being espoused
* questions of consequences that consider the possible outcomes that would accrue to people adhering to the espoused values
* questions of consistency between the values of the narrative and the held values of the audience
* questions of transcendence that consider the extent to which the story’s values represent the highest values possible in human experience

**Assumptions of the Narrative Paradigm**

Despite Fisher’s attempt to show the Narrative Paradigm as a fusion of logic and aesthetic, he does point out that narrative logic is different from traditional logic and reasoning. An important aspect of the assumptions of the Narrative Paradigm is that they contrast with those of the rational world paradigm, just as the two logics differ. Fisher (1987) stipulated five assumptions:

* Humans are natural storytellers.
* Decisions about a story’s worth are based on “good reasons.”
* Good reasons are determined by history, biography, culture, and character.
* Rationality is based on people’s judgments of a story’s consistency and truthfulness.
* We experience the world as filled with stories, and we must choose among them.;

We can see how these clearly contrast to the parallel assumptions Fisher highlights in the rational world paradigm. We will briefly discuss each of the assumptions of the Narrative Paradigm, comparing them with their opposites in the rational world paradigm. First, the Narrative Paradigm assumes that the essential nature of humans is rooted in story and storytelling.

**Criticisms**

Some major critics on Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm include:

* Rowland (1989), who believes that narrative theory should be applied strictly to communication that fits classic narrative patterns, because the generality with which Fisher applies narrative theory undermines its credibility.
* William Kirkwood (1992), who observes that Fisher's logic of good reasons focuses on prevailing values and fails to account for the ways in which stories can promote social change. In some ways, both Kirkwood and Fisher agree that this observation is more of an extension to the theory than a punishing critique.
* Turner (2007), who argued that some forms of communication are not narrative in the way that Fisher maintains. Science fiction and fantasy novels or movies do to conform to most people values, they often challenge values (Turner 2007).

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Communication is a form of storytelling.Discuss this in relation to the narrative paradigm of communication.

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2. What are the assumptions of Narrative Paradism?

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# Chapter Six: Mass Communication Theories

**Introduction**

**Dear Learner**: Welcome to the sixth and the last chapter of this module! This chapter namely discusses concepts of mass communication and its effect theories. The first section of the chapter explains the theoretical concepts of mass communication including its process, types, components and functions. The next part of the chapter deals with the role of technological determinism in mass communication along with critical theory. The other part of the chapter talks about the effects of mass communication theories. Each part of the section, you do have self-exercise questions so that we will widen the understanding of the different theories of mass communication.

**Objectives of the chapter**

Upon completion of this chapter, we will be able to:

* Define concepts of mass communication
* Explain the roles of technological determinism in mass communication
* Define Critical theory
* Differentiate and discuss varies the theories of effects of mass communication like agenda setting, social learning theory, cultivation theory, use and gratification theory, the spiral of silence theory, hypodermic needle theory and two-step flow theory

# 6.1. Mass Communication

Public communication becomes mass communication when it is transmitted to many people through print or electronic media. Print media such as newspapers and magazines continue to be an important channel for mass communication, although they have suffered much in the past decade due in part to the rise of electronic media. Television, websites, blogs, and social media are mass communication channels that you probably engage with regularly. Radio, podcasts, and books are other examples of mass media.

Technological advances such as the printing press, television, and the more recent digital revolution have made mass communication a prominent feature of our daily lives.

Mass communication differs from other forms of communication in terms of the personal connection between participants. Even though creating the illusion of a personal connection is often a goal of those who create mass communication messages, the relational aspect of interpersonal and group communication isn’t inherent within this form of communication. Unlike interpersonal, group, and public communication, there is no immediate verbal and nonverbal feedback loop in mass communication. Of course, you could write a letter to the editor of a newspaper or send an e-mail to a television or radio broadcaster in response to a story, but the immediate feedback available in face-to-face interactions is not present.

With new media technologies like Twitter, blogs, and Facebook, feedback is becoming more immediate. Many radio and television hosts and news organizations specifically invite feedback from viewers/listeners via social media and may even share the feedback on the air.

## 6.1.1. Components of Mass Communication

For a better understanding of the nature of mass communication, we should analyze its two basic components: the mass and the communication media.The Mass -the concept “mass’’ in mass communication is defined as a large, heterogeneous, assorted, anonymous audience. **‘Large’** means we can’t exactly count the number of members of the audience. It is relatively large but it doesn’t mean that the audience includes all people. **‘Heterogeneous’** means the audience of mass media includes all types of people – the rich, the poor, farmers, bureaucrats, politicians and so on. **‘Assorted’** means the audience of mass media is not necessarily limited to a particular geographical sector. They may be scattered everywhere. For example, a newspaper may have a reader in every nook and corner of the world. **‘Anonymous’** means we can’t specifically identify a reader of a newspaper or newspaper with his certain characteristics. Today he may be a reader of a particular newspaper. Tomorrow, he may change his media habit. Anybody at any time may be a member of the mass media audience.

The channels of communication that produce and distribute news, entertainment content, visuals and other cultural products to a large number of people. Mass media can be classified into three major groups on the basis of their physical nature.They are:

* Print Media like newspaper, magazines and periodicals, books, etc.
* Electronic like radio, cinema, television, video and audio records
* Digital Media like CD ROMs, DVDs and Internet facilities.

## 6.1.2. Mass Communication Process

How does mass communication work can be well explained in a linear model of mass communication?. According to this traditional concept, mass communication is a component system made up of senders ( the authors, reporters, producers or agencies) who transmitmessages ( the book content, the news reports, texts, visuals, images, sounds or advertisements) through mass media channels ( books, newspapers, films, magazines, radio, television or the Internet) to a large group of receivers ( readers, viewers, citizens or consumers) after the filtering of gatekeepers ( editors, producers or media managers) with some chance for feedback ( letters to editors, phone calls to news reporters, web-site postings or as audience members of talk shows or television discussions). The effect of this process may formation of public opinion, acceptance of a particular cultural value, setting the agenda for the society and the like.

## 6.1.3. Nature of Mass Communication

From the above model of mass communication, it is easy to identify the following features of mass communication.

**1**. Mass communication experience is a public one. It means that anybody can be a part of this communication process at any time without much effort or permission.

**2**. It is a mediated communication act. Nature of the media involved in the process defines mediation in mass communication. For example, television can transmit news instantly as it is a fast medium, the newspaper takes to bring the same news report to the public because of its limitations. This is how the nature of the media defines the mediation process in mass communication.

**3.** Mass communication is filtered communication. This filtering processing is called gatekeeping. For example, a news report in a newspaper or on a television channel filtered or controlled at a different level by a reporter, sub-editor, news editor, editor.

**4.** It is the most complicated form of communication as it involves complex technology like satellites digital networks, management structure, marketing chain, etc.

**5.** Mass communication can alter the way society thinks about events and attitudes.

**6**. Mass communication experience is transient. It means that once you used a message ( for example, a news report or a film) you may not use it again. The message is meant to be used once and it is gone. Who will read yesterday’s newspaper?

**7.** Mass communication is most often remains as one-way communication. As receivers, how many of us write letters to the editor (sender)? A very few. But, in interpersonal communication, senders and receivers are in active conversation sending feedback to each other.

**8.** Unlike other communicators, mass communicators can’t see their audience. That’s why they can’t change the style of presentation or mode of communication instantly as we do in interpersonal or group communication.

## 6.1.4. Types of Mass Communication

Mass media can be categorized according to physical form, technology involved, nature of the communication process, etc. Given below are the major categories of mass media.

Print Media include

* Newspapers
* Magazines
* books
* other textual documents

Electronic Media mainly include:

* Radio
* Movies
* Television
* Audio and Video records

**New Media**

Online and digital means of producing, transmitting and receiving messages are called new media. The forms of communicating in the digital world include

* CD-ROMs
* DVDs
* Internet facilities like the World Wide Web, bulleting boarding, email, etc.

**Functions of Mass Media**

Mass media have pervasive effects on our personal and social life.

The role and scope of mass media in our society are in the following areas:

* Information
* Education
* Entertainment
* Persuasion

# 6.2. Technological Determinism in Mass Communication

The problem the movie addresses is how to determine what is real when reality exists only in our minds, based on our perceptions and experiences, electromagnetic impulses in our brains which can be simulated and stimulated by machines.

This movie is a prototypical example of technological determinism: people create machines to simplify their lives and serve them, and in the process, create increasingly smarter machines until the machines become smart enough to overthrow the humans. McLuhan believed that human inventions caused cultural change; in the movie, the cultural change was that the machines defined “reality” for people to keep them happy until the machines needed their energy. Though McLuhan was interested primarily in how tools and technology affected communication, he said, “We shape our tools and they, in turn, shape us” (Griffin, 2003, p. 344).

As the technological determinism shows the unintended consequences of what can happen when technological advances are not balanced by self-imposed limitations, rather than “because we can.” , Ethical restraint in technological development becomes a key factor in preventing the future destruction of the human race by its own creation.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. Discuss components of Mass Communication.

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2. Mention different types of Mass Communication.

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3. Explain the functions of mass communication.

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# 6.3. Critical Theory

Critical Theory has a narrow and a broad meaning in philosophy and in the history of the social sciences. “Critical Theory” in the narrow sense designates several generations of German philosophers and social theorists in the Western European Marxist tradition known as the Frankfurt School. According to these theorists,“critical” theory may be distinguished from a “traditional” theory according to a specific practical purpose: a theory is critical to the extent that it seeks human “emancipation from slavery”, acts as a “liberating … influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (Horkheimer 1972, 246).

Because such theories aim to explain and transform all the circumstances that enslave human beings, many “critical theories” in the broader sense have been developed. They have emerged in connection with the many social movements that identify varied dimensions of the domination of human beings in modern societies. In both the broad and the narrow senses, however, the critical theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry aimed at decreasing domination and increasing freedom in all their forms.

# 6.4. Mass Communication Effect Theories

With the rise of mass society and the rapid growth of the mass media starting in the nineteenth century, the public, media critics, and scholars have raised questions about the effects various media might have on society and individuals. These effects were viewed initially as being strong, direct, and relatively uniform on the population as a whole. After World War I, critics were concerned that media-oriented political campaigns could have powerful, direct effects on voters.

Understanding the effects of media on individuals and society requires that we examine the messages being sent, the medium transmitting them, the owners of the media, and the audience members themselves. The effects can be cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, and psychological.

Media effects can also be examined in terms of a number of theoretical approaches, including functional analysis, agenda setting uses and gratifications, social learning, symbolic interactionism, the spiral of silence, media logic, and cultivation analysis.

Our understanding of the relationship among politicians, the press, and the public has evolved over the past half-century. Recent studies have supported interactional approaches to understanding campaign effects, including the resonance and competitive models.

There are different mass communication theories which are discussed in the next parts.

## 6.4.1. Agenda Setting Theory

This Theory is developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw. Media influence affects the order of presentation in news reports about news events, issues in the public mind. More importance to news-more importance attributed by the audience.

Media Priorities say what people should think about and how people should think about.

These are the levels of agenda setting theory:

First Level:

Mostly studied by researchers, the media uses objects or issues to influence the people what people should think about.

Second level:

Media focuses on the characters of issues how people should think about.

Agenda setting theory used in a political ad, campaigns, business news, PR (public relation), etc. The main concept associated with the agenda-setting theory is gatekeeping. Gatekeeping controls over the selection of content discussed in the media; Public cares mostly about the product of a media gatekeeping. It is especially editors media itself is a gatekeeper. News media decides ‘what’ events to admit through media ‘gates’ on the ground of ‘newsworthiness’.

For e.g.: News Comes from various sources, editors choose what should appear and what should not that’s why they are called gatekeepers.

**Priming**

The activity of the media in proposing the values and standards by which objects of the media attention can be judged. Media’s content will provide a lot of time and space to certain issues, making it more vivid.

To say in simple words, Media is giving utmost importance to news so that it gives people the impression that is the most important information.

Headlines, Special news features, discussions, expert opinions are used. Media primes news by repeating the news and giving it more importance E.g. Nuclear deal.

**Framing:**

Framing is a process of selective control.

Two Meanings:

The way in which news content is typically shaped and contextualized within the same frame of reference.

Audience adopts the frames of reference and to see the world in a similar way. It is how people attach importance to news and perceive its context within which an issue is viewed.

Framing talks about how people attach importance to certain news for e.g. in case of attack, defeat, win and loss, how the media frames the news such that people perceive it in a different way.

Assumptions of Agenda Setting Theory

* Media distorts reality by filtering and reshaping
* Media concentrating on specific issues make people perceive that the issues are more importan**t**.

**Examples of Agenda Setting Theory**

The Clinton scandal and the Watergate scandal are some of the prime examples. The Clinton scandal, the sexual affair of Bill Clinton (U.S. President) and Monica Lewinsky (an intern), created a media frenzy and became sensational news for years. Media gave full pages of news as top stories. The media influenced the mindset of people so much and the news got viral to result in a presidential impeachment. And later, Clinton was acquitted for the crime.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. What is the concept of Agenda setting Theory?

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2. What is the role of agenda setting in media?

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## 6.4.2. Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory is a general theory of human behavior, but Bandura (1977) and people concerned with mass communication (e.g television news) have used it specifically to explain media effects. Bandura warned that children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised modeling.

Social Learning Theory in media pertains to how learning can be facilitated by mere observation of what's being presented through media. Albert Bandura cautioned that TV might create a violent reality that was worth fearing. Bandura's warning struck a responsive chord in parents and educators who feared that escalating violence on TV would transform children into bullies. Bandura regards anxiety over televised violence as legitimate.

He explains that social learning or "observational learning" involves how behaviors and attitudes can be modeled merely by observing the behaviors and attitudes of others. Bandura performed an experiment called the Bobo Doll Experiment involving having children to observe adults displaying aggressive behavior toward a doll named Bobo. The adults punched, kicked, and verbally insulted the doll, all in the children's presence. The result of the experiment showed a marked increase in aggressive behavior from the children toward Bobo the doll. These results tend to support the Social Learning Theory.

An important factor of Bandura’s social learning theory is the emphasis on reciprocal determinism. This notion states that an individual’s behavior is influenced by the environment and characteristics of the person. In other words, a person’s behavior, environment, and personal qualities all reciprocally influence each other. Bandura proposed that the modeling process involves several steps:

* Attention – in order for an individual to learn something, they must pay attention to the features of the modeled behavior.
* Retention – humans need to be able to remember details of the behavior in order to learn and later reproduce the behavior.
* Reproduction – in reproducing a behavior, an individual must organize his or her responses in accordance with the model behavior. This ability can improve with practice.
* Motivation – there must be an incentive or motivation driving the individual’s reproduction of the behavior. Even if all of the above factors are present, the person will not engage in the behavior without motivation.

Social (or Observational) Learning Theory stipulates that people can learn new behaviors by observing others. Earlier learning theories emphasized how people behave in response to environmental stimuli, such as physical rewards or punishment. In contrast, social learning emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between social characteristics of the environment, how they are perceived by individuals, and how motivated and able a person is to reproduce behaviors they see happening around them. People both influence and are influenced by the world around them.

According to Social Learning Theory, people learn by:

* Observing what other people do
* Considering the apparent consequences experienced by those people
* Rehearsing (at first mentally) what might happen in their own lives if they followed the other peoples’ behavior
* Taking action by trying the behavior themselves
* Comparing their experiences with what happened to the other people
* Confirming their belief in the new behavior

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. According to Bandura, what are the modeling processes in social learning theory?

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1. How do people learn in social learning theory?

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## 6.4.3. Spiral of Silence Theory

The focus of the spiral of silence theory is on how public opinion is formed. The theory explains why people often feel the need to conceal their opinions, preference or views, etc, especially when they fall within the minority of a group.

Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, the German political scientist, proposed the theory as an attempt to explain in part how public opinion is formed. She wondered why the Germans supported wrong political positions that led to national defeat, humiliation and ruin in the 1930s-1940s.

The mass media plays an important role in the spiral effect process (Okenwa, 2002). The mass media play a powerful role here, in that they define the dominant views and add importance to it.

The tendency of one to speak up and the other to be silent starts off a spiral process which increasingly establishes one opinion as to the prevailing one. Because of the power of the media, the media can wield and canvass popular views so that individual views in opposition to the media become unpopular. The spiral process may activate a downward spiral effect, thus building fears on minority opinion holder.

The theory identifies two reasons why people remain silence;

* Fear of isolation when the group or public realizes that the individual has a divergent opinion from the status quo.
* Fear of reprisal or more extreme isolation, in the sense that voicing said opinion might lead to a negative consequence beyond that of mere isolation (loss of a job, relationship or status, etc.)

The theory has some weaknesses or at least points of contention. Okenwa observed that the problem of this theory is that it can as well canvass unpopular views through the use of specialized channels. Secondly, the media can only silence those who have access to the media. Those who are independent of the media hold their views.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

* What is the implication and application of Spiral of Silent Theory in the context of Ethiopia?

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## 6.4.4. Cultivation Theory

The Cultivation Theory explains how television shapes concepts of social reality. The  
the assumption here is that television shapes people’s view of social reality. The theory posits that the more people are exposed to television, the more their perception of reality influence to  
conform to that spread by television.

Okenwa (2002) explains this theory as propounded by Gerbner, Gross, Signarelli and Morgan.  
She asserts that the mass media especially television, exerts a tremendous influence by altering  
an individuals perception of reality. Gerbner et al who hold that television, among modern media, has acquired such a central place in daily life put it classically that ‘the television set has become a key member of the family, the one who tells most of the stories most of the time’.

It assumes that the more time people spend watching television, the more their world views will be like those spread by the television. Today television has so altered our world view that most of our cultures and traditional beliefs are being exchanged with western culture. For instance, our traditional dressing is almost out-dated for western styles. Families now feel more proud and comfortable communicating in a foreign language with little or no interest in their mother tongue language.

**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

1. How can the television become more powerful molding people according to Cultivation Theory?

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## 6.4.5. Uses and Gratification Theory

The focus of this theory is on media use. Okunna (1999) observed that the functional use of mass communication is what the Uses and Gratification Theory explains. The Uses and Gratification Theory is also called Functional Theory. A good illustration of this theory is the functional use of television for entertainment by television audience members. The needs of viewers to solve or forget problems and reduce tension have always been a strong motivation for watching television entertainment (Compesi, 1980; Hotsetter and Buss, 1981).

Thus, the Uses and Gratification Theory validates the assumption that audience members actively seek out the mass media to satisfy individual needs. According to the theory, media consumers have free will to decide how they will use the media and how it will affect them.

Blumler and Katz (1974) believe that there is not merely one way that the populace uses media. Instead, they believe there are as many reasons for using the media, as there are media users. Blumler and Katz values are clearly seen by the fact that they believe that media consumers can choose the influence media has on them as well as the idea that users choose media alternatives merely as a means to an end.

The Uses and Gratification Theory can be seen in cases such as personal music selection. We select music not only to fit a particular mood but also in attempts to show empowerment or other social conscious motives. There are many different types of music and we choose from them to fulfill a particular need.

Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch developed the Uses and Gratifications Model to better study how and why people were using media for personal satisfaction.

## 6.4.6. Hypodermic Needle Theory

The Hypodermic Needle Theory focuses on the direct influence via mass media. The theory states that mass media had a direct, immediate and powerful effect on its audiences.

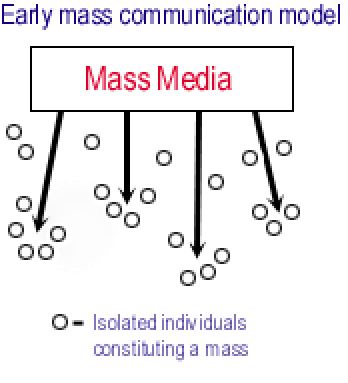
Okunna explains that in the early attempts to understand the effects of mass communication, the media message was liken to a bullet released as a member of the audience. Like a bullet, the message would be received by the individual directly and it would have an immediate and powerful effect on him or her, persuading him or her to behave exactly the way the media message advocated.

This theory assumes that the mass media message could reach a very large group of people directly and uniformly to influence change in thought, attitude and behavior.

The theory, also known as the ‘Bullet Theory’ graphically suggests that the message is a bullet, fired from the "media gun "into the viewer's "head". With similarly emotive imagery the hypodermic needle model suggests that media messages are injected straight into a passive audience which is immediately influenced by the message.

Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, (1944/1968) express the view that the media are a dangerous means of communicating an idea because the receiver or audience is powerless to resist the impact of the message. There is no escape from the effect of the message in these models. The population is seen as a sitting duck. People are seen as passive and are seen as having a lot of media material "shot" at them. People end up thinking what they are told because there is no other source of information.

**Magic Bullet Theory Model**



**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Hypodemic needle theory is the major effect of mass communication. In what situation and geaographical area, media can directly inject message into passive audience?

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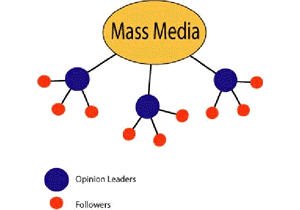
## 6.4.7. Two-Step Flow Theory

The Two-Step Flow Theory focuses on the influence of media messages. This theory asserts that information from the media moves in two distinct stages. First, individuals (opinion leaders) who pay close attention to the mass media and its messages receive the information. Opinion leaders pass on their own interpretations in addition to the actual media content.

The term personal influence ‘was coined to refer to the process intervening between the media‘s direct message and the audience‘s ultimate reaction to that message. Opinion leaders are quite influential in getting people to change their attitudes and behaviors and are quite similar to those they influence.

The Two-step Flow Theory has improved our understanding of how the mass media influence decision making. The theory refined the ability to predict the influence of media messages on audience behavior, and it helped explain why certain media campaigns may have failed to alter audience attitudes an behavior. The two-step flow theory gave way to the multi-step flow theory of mass communication or diffusion of innovation theory.

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**SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

Discuss briefly the Two-steps theory of Mass Communication

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