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Theory of Information and Communication

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Communication: Theories and Models



1. Introduction

Communication is a complex process involving multiple components and relationships. To make sense of this complexity, scholars have developed various models and paradigms that serve as metaphors for communication. These models offer visual and conceptual frameworks for understanding the dynamics between communicators, messages, channels, and audiences.

In the last unit, we started understanding this process with the Mathematical Theory of Information, which provides a foundation for many communication studies. This theory, rooted in Claude Shannon's work, quantifies information and introduces concepts such as information entropy. It frames communication as a mathematical process, focusing on the efficiency and accuracy of transmitting messages through different channels. However, this theory did not concern itself with that information's meaning or semantic content.

Building on this theoretical foundation, we will explore models that serve as metaphors, representing the agents, components, and relationships involved in communication. These models offer visual descriptions and conceptual tools to understand how communication unfolds. For instance, Shannon's linear model visualizes communication as a straightforward process involving a sender, a message, a channel, and a receiver.

Other models introduce additional elements like feedback and noise, acknowledging that communication is not always linear. Similarly, interactive and transactional models depict communication as a dynamic and reciprocal process, emphasizing the roles of feedback, context, and continuous exchange between communicators.

Each model serves as a metaphor, providing a lens through which we can examine and interpret the complex reality of communication. By understanding these different paradigms, we gain insights into how messages are constructed, transmitted, and received and how various factors influence the effectiveness and clarity of communication.

In summary, exploring different communication models provides valuable frameworks for visualizing and analyzing the components and relationships involved in communication.

In communication theory, one of the foundational models for understanding the communication process is Lasswell's Model of Communication. This model breaks down the communication act into five key components that answer this question: Who says what, in which channel, and to whom, with what effect? Each stage of the communication process has led to different theories and techniques for analyzing communication: control analysis, content analysis, audience analysis, and media analysis.

2. Models of Communication

Communication models are simplified structures that aim to reduce the fundamental elements of social communication as conceived by various researchers. Aguado (2014) recognizes that using models, especially when dealing with a complex phenomenon, involves simplification. McQuail & Windahl (1997) outline these models' various positive and negative aspects. These can be summarised in:

- *Advantages*: Models help to organize information and establish relationships between the different parts of the communication process.
- *Disadvantages*: They can be overly general and create problems between theory and application

2.1 The beginning: Laswell Communication Model

The **Lasswell Model of Communication** is one of communication theory's earliest and most influential frameworks. Developed by Harold D. Lasswell in 1948, the model defines communication as the intentional act of one person directing a message to another. Lasswell's model breaks down the communication process into five key questions: "Who says what, in which channel, and to whom, with what effect?" This model highlights the critical elements of any communication act: the communicator (who), the message (says what), the medium (in which channel), the audience (to whom), and the effect (with what effect) (Figure 1)

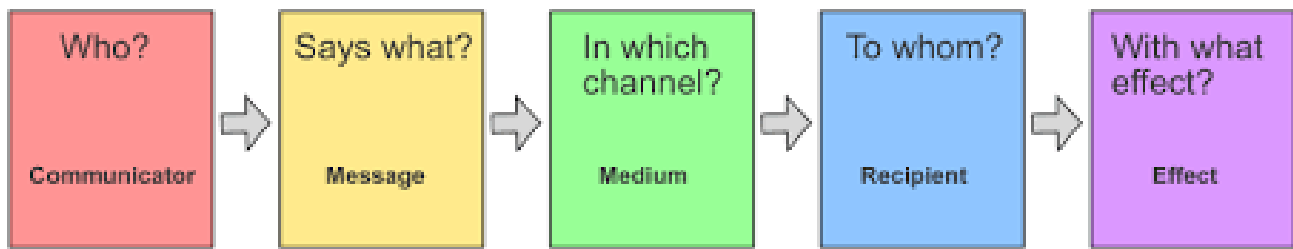


Figure 1 Lasswell's model of communication https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lasswell%27s_model_of_communication.svg

Aguado (2004) recognises that Lasswell's model's simplicity and clarity, combined with its highly functional nature, have made it the foundation for most of the research in mass communication.

2.1.1. Features of the Lasswell Model

1. **Influence of Persuasive Propaganda:** Lasswell's model was significantly inspired by the persuasive propaganda techniques that emerged during the two world wars
2. **Asymmetry in Communication:** According to Lasswell, mass communication is asymmetric, clearly distinguishing between an active sender and a passive audience. This unidirectional flow of communication suggests that the sender controls the message while the audience remains passive, receiving it without any direct implication in its creation or dissemination.
3. **Media's Role in Affecting the Audience:** In Lasswell's model, the media channel is crucial in delivering the message to the audience. The content of the message, as conveyed through the chosen medium, directly affects the audience. Communication effectiveness is often measured by how well the message reaches its target and how it influences or changes the audience's perceptions, attitudes, or behaviours.

2.1.2. Problematic Aspects of the Lasswell Model

While the Lasswell Model has been widely used to understand essential communication dynamics, it has several limitations:

- **A linear model:** The Lasswell Model is fundamentally linear, representing communication as a one-way process from sender to receiver.
- **No feedback:** One of the significant criticisms of Lasswell's model is its lack of a feedback component. By not accounting for feedback, the model does not consider the possibility of the audience responding to the sender's message, a critical aspect of communication. This model forget that communication is often dynamic and
- **Assumes passive audience:** Lasswell's model presumes that the audience is a passive recipient of information, which may only sometimes be accurate. Audiences are often active interpreters of messages whose backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes can influence how they understand and respond to communication.

Despite these limitations, Lasswell's model remains an essential tool in communication theory, particularly for understanding the processes involved in mass communication. It provides a straightforward framework for analyzing how messages are constructed, transmitted, and received, underscoring the importance of the message's effect on the audience. However, models incorporating feedback, audience interaction, and a more dynamic understanding of communication processes are necessary to fully capture the complexities of communication, especially in the digital age. The historical context of propaganda continues to serve as a reminder of communication's power and the importance of understanding its mechanisms.

2.1.3 The influence of the Propaganda

Lasswell specialized in studying propaganda and its impact on shaping public opinion and attitudes. Adopting a behaviorist view of society, he believed that with the right stimuli, the masses could adopt pre-determined opinions and attitudes set by leaders or media. His work published in 1927, entitled *Propaganda Techniques in the World War*, examines propaganda strategies during World War I and the role of emerging mass media. For Lasswell, propaganda was a more effective means of mass control than violence or force. He equated media audiences with the masses—an unstructured collective responding more to unconscious or emotional stimuli than rational arguments (Aguado, 2004). Therefore, he pioneered theories attributing omnipotent effects to mass communication, known as the "hypodermic needle" paradigm (Cerruti, 2019). According to this perspective, this initial model, which emerged in the 1920s and 1930s, proposed that the media have consequential and direct effects on how individuals think and behave (Gurevitch, Bennett, Curran, and Woollacott, 2005)

During World War I, propaganda was crucial in shaping public opinion and mobilizing support for the war effort. Governments and other organizations used propaganda to influence the masses, boost morale, and maintain public support for the war. The widespread use of propaganda during this period significantly impacted Harold Lasswell's work and theoretical development. A key example is the U.S. Committee on Public Information (CPI), the **Creel Committee**, named after its founder and director, George Creel.

Propaganda, as a tool for influencing public opinion and behavior, is not a modern phenomenon but a historical constant that has evolved. According to Laswell (1927 p. 627), propaganda is the management of collective attitudes by manipulating significant symbols.

2.2. Circular models. Osgood y Schramm Model

Circular models of communication emerged from incorporating feedback into the initial linear models of communication. The cybernetic concept of feedback redefined communication (the transmission and selection of information) as a process of control or regulation within social processes (Aguado, 2004).

The Osgood and Schramm communication model (1954) challenges the idea of communication as a linear process with a clear beginning and end. Instead, it presents communication as a circular and continuous process, building on Shannon and Weaver's concept of encoding and decoding. The model emphasizes that communication is ongoing and involves constant feedback, where each participant simultaneously acts as both sender and receiver, allowing for a more interactive and dynamic exchange of messages (Figure 2).

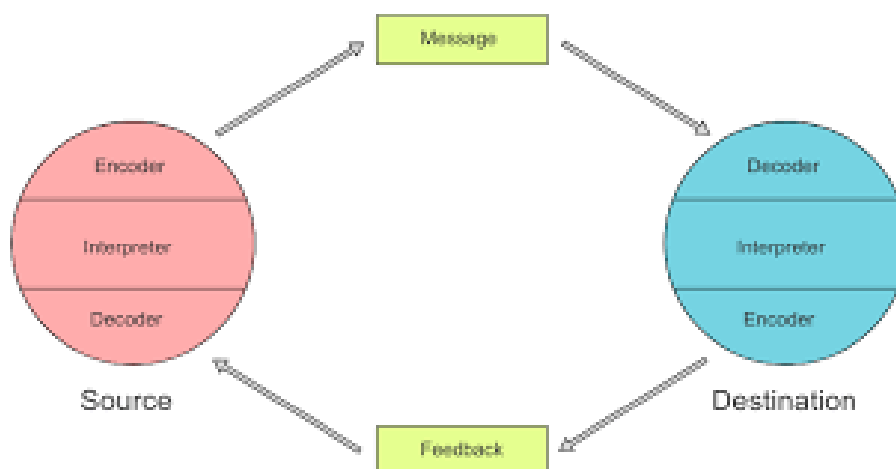
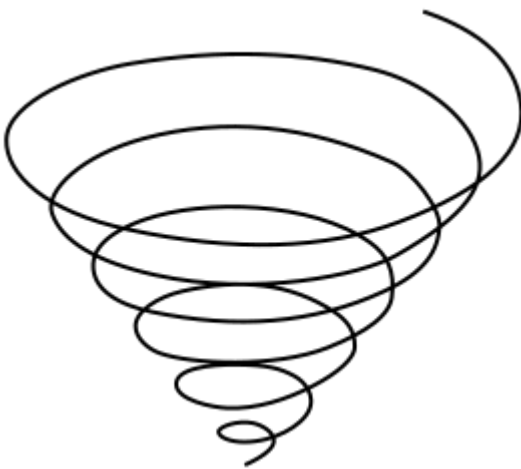


Figure 2 Schramm's model of communication https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schramm%27s_model_of_communication.svg

2.3. Dance Model

Building on the idea of communication as an indefinite process without a clear beginning or end, Dance (1967) proposes extending the circular communication model into a spiral (Aguado, 2004). The helical communication model proposed by Dance builds on the ideas of Osgood and Schramm but moves beyond the circular concept. Instead of communication simply looping back to its starting point, the helical model represents it as a spiral, emphasizing its dynamic and evolving nature. This model suggests that each communicative event influences the next, allowing communication to progress and change over time. The spiral also reflects that, depending on our knowledge or experience regarding a topic, we may find ourselves at different points—either at the bottom, with less understanding, or at the top, with greater insight (Figure 3).



2.4 Network models

Circular communication models have gradually increased in complexity, particularly as they move from considering communication solely at the psychological or social level to integrating both aspects. This shift has paved the way for network models, which conceptualize communication as a web of influences where information and meanings are transmitted and exchanged. In this framework, the attitudes, opinions, and behaviours of individuals within a society are continuously shaped and formed (Aguado, 2004).

2.4.1. New Comb's model of communication

The ABX model, known as Newcomb's model, presents a simple framework for understanding communication. It illustrates how one person (A) transmits information (X) to another person (B), emphasizing that communication serves primarily as a means of sustaining relationships between individuals. Symmetry is central to this model, highlighting that communication is often aimed at achieving consensus between A and B regarding topic X. The model inherently seeks equilibrium, promoting interdependent relationships where A and B strive to balance their perspectives and maintain mutual understanding.

According to this model, communication is only initiated if there is an existing relationship between A and B and if at least one of them has an interest in X. This principle is broadly applicable in persuasive communication contexts, such as advertising and politics (Aguado, 2004) (Figure 4).

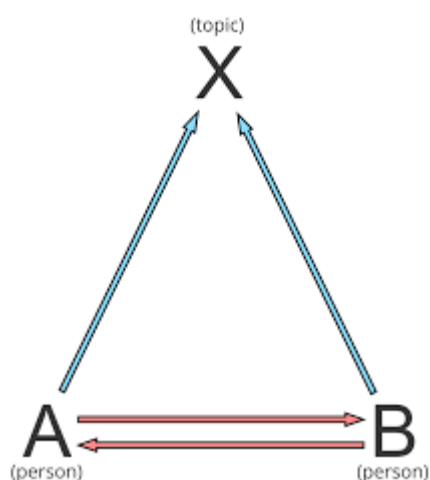


Figure 4 Newcomb's model of communication https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Newcomb%27s_model_of_communication.svg

2.4.2. Gerber Model

This model applies to all forms of communication, including interpersonal, group, and mass communication. It provides a framework for understanding how communication operates in the media. Essentially, it describes a process where someone (A) perceives something and responds within a particular situation. This response involves using specific means to present materials in a particular format and context, ultimately conveying content that leads to specific consequences.

Gerber's Model of Communication is important because it offers a comprehensive view of the communication process, accounting for the dynamic interplay between the sender, message, medium, and receiver. It emphasizes the audience's active role in interpreting and responding to messages, thus acknowledging that communication is not a one-way process but involves interaction and feedback.

3. Studies and Techniques for Communication

As mentioned, researchers model the different agents involved in the communication process to theoretically represent the relationship between the various communication components. Over the decades, these models have become increasingly complex, incorporating the social perspectives necessary to understand the communication process.

Likewise, each component of these models has generated its research areas. Below, we mention some of the most notable ones.

3.1. Sender/Control Analysis

Studies related to the sender or communicator focus on understanding the attributes, intentions, and strategies of individuals or entities that produce messages. These studies uncover how the sender's features influence the communication's effectiveness.

Let's look at the communication process from the perspective of the sender. It is undeniable that throughout history, new developments have affected the role of the sender and their effects on both the message and the receiver.

The control of communication has always existed. Before the invention of the printing press, various forms of social communication were already in use. Historical examples include Xenophon's *Anabasis* and the *Acta Diurna Populi Romani*, established by Julius Caesar. Ángel Benito's thesis on the Roman origins of journalism highlights two key reasons for this connection: the centrality of news as the core of information and the public nature of shared information.

The *Acta Diurna*, or Daily Public Records, were official Roman notes functioning as a gazette of political and social events. Published daily under the influence of Julius Caesar, these records documented official business and matters of public interest, making them one of the earliest examples of a newspaper. The *Acta Diurna* was instrumental in informing the public about daily occurrences in Roman society.

During the medieval period, a solid oral tradition was still crucial, compounded by the low literacy rates of the time. Minstrels and troubadours were key in disseminating stories and news during this era.

The role of manuscripts in historical communication should be thoroughly considered. Background sources include almanacs and Cordel literature (popular literature). Manuscripts such as the letters of Christopher Columbus and reports from Jesuits in their evangelization efforts played a crucial role. In Italy, manuscripts were known as *avisi* and *fogli a mano* (handwritten sheets). In France, they were referred to as *nouvelles à la main*, while in Spain, they were known as *notices* and *relations*. These early notices, often linked to freight traffic and current prices (as seen in the UK), also covered curious events. Notably, they lacked formal titles and regular publication schedules.

The Printing Revolution brought significant changes: it enabled the mass production of content, reduced costs, and facilitated widespread dissemination. This period saw the creation of informative content characterized by timeliness, regularity, and advertising. Gazettes emerged as the first media to integrate these features. Their evolution was closely tied to wars and produced a vast amount of information, reflecting the ideas of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

The *Relation oder Zeitung* (1609-1610) is recognized as the first gazette. Similarly, the *Nieuwe Tijdinghen*, a Flemish newspaper published in Antwerp (Netherlands), was a significant player in the media landscape as it was subsidized by the powerful Spanish Crown. It reported on events such as the Triumph of the Army of Flanders (Tercios de Flandes), which was also produced by printers in Antwerp. Gazettes became symbols of media control by the absolutist state, reflecting the privileges and regulated content of the time.

In the 17th century, what we now consider a journal began to emerge with publications such as the *Journal des Sçavans* (1665) and *Philosophical Transactions* (1666), which focused on scientific information. From the outset, the *Journal des Sçavans* aimed to disseminate news about books and individuals within the "République des Lettres." This included scientific research and extensive discussions on Cartesian philosophy, a prominent intellectual theme of the century, encompassing both support and criticism (Figure 5)

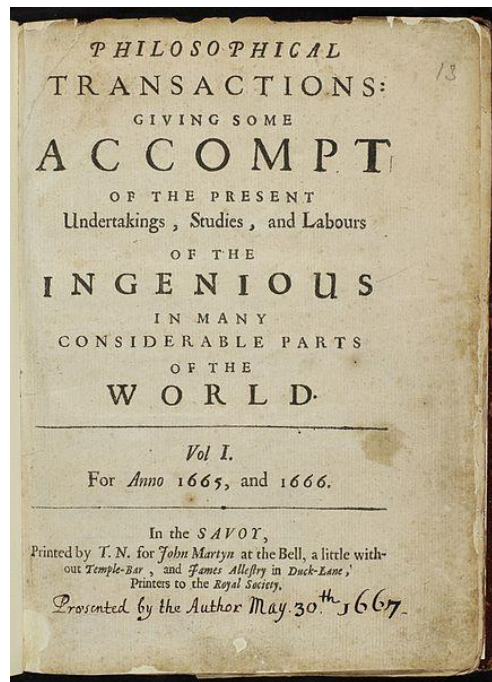


Figure 5 Philosophical Transactions https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Philosophical_Transactions_Volume_1_frontispiece.jpg

During this period, there were parallel efforts to control the flow of information, such as the 1640 attempts to impose taxes on writings and require licenses for printed materials. John Milton's *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing to the Parliament of England* emerged as a robust response to these restrictions. In this work, Milton's passionate argument against the censorship of books before their publication not only presented the first fervent plea for freedom of speech, but also significantly impacted the concept of freedom of speech.

The emergence of newspapers played a significant role in developing public service news and information, fostering social criticism. This evolution reached its peak with the French Revolution in 1789. In England, *The Daily Courant* (1702) became the world's first daily newspaper, marking a turning point in journalism. Meanwhile, *El Diario de Madrid* (1758) began to shape the daily news landscape in Spain. Another significant development was the creation of *The Daily Universal Register*, now known as *The Times*. It not only pioneered market research, a forward-thinking approach that would shape the industry for years to come, but also offered a variety of sections and was published an hour earlier than its competitors, establishing itself as a key player in the field. The *Times* further solidified its influence by sending the first correspondents to cover the Napoleonic Wars.

The 19th century marked the consolidation of the press, introducing lighter content and new sections to attract a broader audience. During this period, Napoleon reinstated absolute control over the press. The first political press emerged in Spain during the period of las Cortes de Cádiz.

Several vital factors drove this evolution of the press:

- the Industrial Revolution
- the expansion of rail transport
- the rise of advertising as a financial model
- the development of news agencies facilitated by telegraphy

The evolving press model in the 19th century necessitated reducing costs and increasing the speed of news dissemination, as traditional methods often resulted in delayed reporting. The invention of the telegraph revolutionized communication by enabling rapid transmission of news, leading to the creation of news agencies. The first such agency, HAVAS, was founded in France and soon inspired similar models in Germany and other countries. HAVAS focused on news distribution and established an advertising division, recognizing the importance of integrating content delivery with commercial opportunities.

During this time, in the United States, the newspaper industry developed with a focus on profitability. To achieve this, publishers quickly adopted advertising as a critical auxiliary tool to lower prices and increase circulation, making newspapers more accessible to a broader audience. The emergence of advertising created a sustainable financial model,

This period also saw the formation of media consortiums, such as the Associated Press (AP), which aimed to pool resources and share news content across different publications.

Additionally, newspapers began to diversify their content to attract more readers. One of the pioneers of this trend was Joseph Pulitzer, who introduced a blend of information and entertainment, a style now commonly referred to as "infotainment." Pulitzer's approach was characterized by sensationalism, designed to captivate and engage the public. This era gave birth to the "yellow press," a style of journalism focused on scandalous and entertainment over objective writing.

The two World Wars in the 20th century significantly transformed the media and communication landscape. During this period, new media emerged, driven by rapid technological advancements such as the development of cinema, radio, and later, television. These new forms of media provided dynamic and engaging ways to disseminate information, entertainment, and propaganda, and quickly gained popularity among the masses.

The increasing reach and influence of the press paralleled the popularity of these new media formats. Higher levels of literacy, along with the introduction of more varied and accessible content, made newspapers a more profitable business. However, this era also marked a period of consolidation within the industry, as only the strongest newspapers could withstand the competition and economic pressures. Many newspapers began to group into larger media conglomerates, such as holdings or trusts, to share costs, and increase their market influence.

This period also saw a significant development in propaganda, particularly during both World Wars.

The economic crash of 1929, known as the Great Depression, brought additional challenges to the media landscape. The press experienced a sharp decline in revenue due to the economic downturn, which reduced advertising income and sales. This financial strain was compounded by the growing competition from newer, more immediate forms of media like radio and cinema, which offered a different kind of entertainment and news delivery that attracted larger audiences.

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The year 1938 marked a significant turning point in using radio as a powerful medium for mass communication. Two events underscored its influence: the Munich Crisis broadcasts and Orson Welles' famous radio play, "The War of the Worlds."

Both events in 1938 highlighted radio's rapid dissemination of information, creating real-time engagement and even manipulating public emotion. This immediacy marked a turning point in the recognition of radio as a dominant force in mass communication, capable of influencing both public opinion and the course of political events.

3.2. Theories for the audience and the effects

The study of audiences and the effects of media has undergone a deep evolution over the past century, a transformation that reflects relations between media, society, and individual behaviour. Initially, audience studies focused on the effect of the media on a passive audience. However, as media landscapes and technologies have grown more complex, new interesting approaches appear to study the connection with the audience and its possible effects.

Studies on the effects of communication have evolved, beginning with early theories about the power of the media. Initially, it was believed that the media's influence was unlimited. Berelson (1948) summarizes this perspective: "Some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects."

The evolution of media effects theories unfolds in three distinct phases, each marking a significant shift in our understanding of the media's influence.

1. **Until the mid-1940s**, the Media was thought to have robust and immediate effects. This period, characterized by a strong communication effect, was heavily influenced by the concept of propaganda, where the media was seen as a force capable of shaping public opinion and behavior.
2. **By the 1960s**, a shift in the perception of media effects was underway. The once unchallenged belief in the media's strong and direct influence was being dismantled. Research during this period suggested that media effects were not as potent or direct as previously believed, leading to the notion of 'weak effects.' This paradigm shift opened new frontiers for research and ignited a fresh wave of interest in communication and media studies.
3. **Up to today**. Our understanding of media effects continues to evolve today. We now perceive media influence as having limited effects, acknowledging that it is conditional and dependent on various factors such as audience characteristics, content, and context. This ongoing evolution underscores the dynamic nature of the field of communication and media studies.

3.2.1 Unlimited effects period

The model of unlimited effects, also known as the hypodermic needle model or the magic bullet theory, posited that mass media audiences were powerless to resist the messages conveyed by the media.

According to this model, media messages were uniformly received by all public members, a powerful assumption underpinning the theory's expectations of immediate and direct reactions, as described by Rokeach and Ball-Rokeach (1989).

The theory was primarily based on the effects observed during propaganda campaigns, such as those during World War I when the media was used to influence public opinion. However, over time, the Hypodermic Needle Theory has been criticized for oversimplifying the relationship between the media and its audience. Modern research suggests

that media effects are more complex, considering the social context, and a selective exposure that influences how people interpret and respond to media messages.

3.2.2. Limited-effects theory

Limited-effects theory is a concept in media studies that suggests that the influence of mass media on audiences is less powerful and direct than once believed. Unlike earlier theories like the Hypodermic Needle Theory, which assumed that media had a uniform effect on a passive audience, the Limited-Effects Theory believes that media effects are much more restrained and are influenced by various factors.

The Limited Effects Theory was developed in the late 1940s by sociologists researching social context and media effects. There are two critical elements in this period:

- The conception of the selective exposure and perception of the media content
- The influence of the social context in how people receive the content (especially opinion leaders)

The theory draws from psychological research, particularly the work of Leon Festinger's 1957 Theory of Cognitive Dissonance. This behaviour aligns with the Limited Effects Theory's claim that media does not have a uniform influence on all individuals; instead, people selectively expose themselves to messages that reinforce their existing views.

3.2.3. Effects under limited conditions (1970-)

This period is marked by a renewed interest in powerful media effects. It represents a nuanced blending of previous theoretical stages, acknowledging that while media effects were not universally powerful, they could be significant in specific contexts or circumstances.

At this stage, researchers sought to demonstrate mass media's influence while acknowledging the audience's selective capacity (Wartella and Middelstadt, 1991).

An example of this new interpretation of the media's more powerful effects is the work of McCombs and Shaw (1972), who, in the context of research on political communication and voting behavior, developed their agenda-setting hypothesis as a form of media influence.

Agenda-setting theory describes the ability of news media to influence the importance placed on topics in the public agenda, essentially determining which issues are deemed newsworthy. Developed by McCombs and Shaw in the early 1970s through their study of election campaigns, the theory highlights a correlation between the issues that the media emphasize as essential and the issues that the public perceives as significant.

The renewed focus on a research agenda that emphasized a more powerful and direct version of media effects is closely linked to the evolving media landscape of the 1960s, a period marked by growing public concern about the influence of television (O'Neill, 2011). Before the rise of social networks, the ability of traditional media to shape public opinion was dominant.

Another key figure in the renewed interest in the power of the media is Noam Chomsky's redefinition of the concept of propaganda. His work, especially in collaboration with Edward S. Herman in the book "Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media" (1988), provides a critical perspective on how media influences public opinion and perception of reality. It contradicts the idea of "limited effects" by suggesting that the media has a powerful and systematic impact on shaping public opinion, not by "dictating" what to think directly but by molding the available information and the topics that become the focus of public discussion. Based on the premise of "manufacturing consent," Chomsky argues that the media "manufactures consent" by manipulating information and presenting a biased view of reality that legitimizes dominant policies and ideologies.

Finally, new theories emerge that provide insights into the perception of the influence of dominant opinions, such as the Spiral of Silence Theory developed by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974). Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence Theory explains how public opinion is shaped through a process influenced by social control. According to the theory, individuals tend to adapt their opinions and behaviors to align with the perceived majority to avoid social isolation. This is driven by the fear of rejection or exclusion, which compels people to suppress their views if they perceive them as being in the minority. When individuals feel that their opinions are supported by the majority or the prevailing social environment, they are more likely to express them confidently.

The theory highlights how the visibility and prominence of specific opinions in the media can impact the perception that views are predominant. This media influence reinforces the spiral of silence by making dominant opinions appear more acceptable while minority views become less visible and less likely to be expressed. It illustrates how media representation can affect the diversity and openness of public debate.

3.3. Content studies

Content theories in media communication studies focus on analyzing media content and its impact on audiences. These theories examine how media messages, including their narratives and representations, affect individual behaviors.

3.3.1. Introduction: the structure of the news

Since news has been the media's most paradigmatic form of content transmission, this course will cover its characteristics and the interpretive techniques that can be employed to analyze its content.

The structure of a news item plays a crucial role in how information is presented. One of the most influential structures in journalism is the **Inverted Pyramid** model. This approach to news writing, which prioritizes information delivery by placing the most important details at the beginning and progressively providing less critical information toward the end, has played a pivotal role in shaping modern news reporting methods. Its origin was attributed to the Succession War and was notably influenced by advancements in telegraphy, which significantly altered news reporting methods (Scanlan, 2003).

The Inverted Pyramid model is characterized by its specific structure (figure 6):

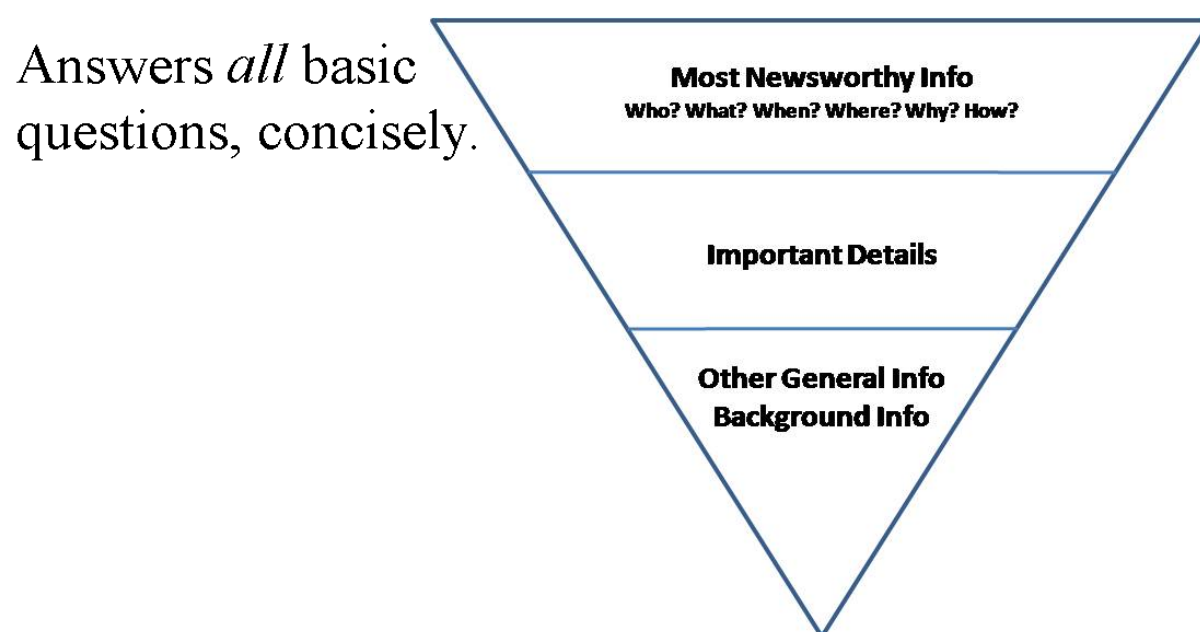


Figure 6 Inverted pyramid article structure https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Inverted_pyramid_article_structure.png

The parts of the inverted pyramid are:

1. **Lead (Beginning):** This section is the cornerstone of the news article. It contains the most crucial information—who, what, when, where, why, and how. It aims to grab the reader's attention by concisely summarizing the key facts.
2. **Body (Middle):** Here, the news item expands on the lead with additional details, context, and supporting information. This section offers a deeper understanding of the story but remains secondary to the main points introduced in the lead.
3. **Tail (End):** This final section includes less critical information, such as background details or additional context that enriches the story but is optional for understanding the core message.

With the rise of online journalism, the Inverted Pyramid model's dominance has weakened. Online news formats allow for more flexible article lengths, and the influence of bloggers, who often reject traditional structures, has further diminished the model's prominence.

3.3.2 Content analysis as a research technique

Content Analysis, defined by Bernard R. Berelson in 1952 as "a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p. 18), is a method for studying media content in a structured and empirical manner. This technique involves analysing textual and visual content to systematically gather and interpret the information.

We can use content analysis as a technique to evaluate information published. It has several uses:

- Discover trends and patterns, analyzing the perspective of different themes over time
- Analyzing media influence by examining the media messages about people's behavior
- Uncover underlying intentions behind the content to convey certain perspectives in public opinion

3.4. Mass Communication analyses

To close these notes, we open a specific epigraph to point out the concept of Mass Communication and how all the elements we have seen (sender, receiver, sender, and receiver) are altered by the specific conception of their non-reciprocity in the emission and reception of information and in its capacity to shape public information. Many studies or schools of thought base their development on Mass Communication, which extends to the present day.

The concept of Mass Communication draws heavily from early 20th-century ideas about society and its capacity for alienation. The sociological perspective on the study of "Mass Society" and its implications forms the basis for understanding how media directly influences opinions and behaviors on a social level.

Different scholars have long studied collective behavior and its implications for society. Theoretical frameworks developed during this period, particularly those by Gustave Le Bon and later by José Ortega y Gasset, offer valuable insights into the nature of mass behavior and its effects on modern society. Gustave Le Bon's work, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (1895), introduced the concept of "crowd mentality" or "collective mind." José Ortega y Gasset's work *The Revolt of the Masses* (1930) offers a more nuanced understanding of mass behavior. Ortega y Gasset critiques the rise of mass society and introduces the concept of the "mass-man," a term used to describe individuals who are part of a larger, homogenized social group (Ortega y Gasset, 1930, initial paragraph):

"This is one fact which, whether for good or ill, is of utmost importance in the public life of Europe at the present moment. This fact is the accession of the masses to complete social power. As the masses, by

definition, neither should nor can direct their own personal existence, and still less rule society in general, this fact means that actually, Europe is suffering from the greatest crisis that can afflict peoples, nations, and civilization. Such a crisis has occurred more than once in history. Its characteristics and its consequences are well known. So also, is its name. It is called the rebellion of the masses."

C. Wright Mills revisits and expands upon the concept of Mass Society, applying it specifically to the study of Public Opinion. He differentiates between 'Public' and 'Masses' by defining the Public as individuals who share opinions within a framework of open discussion. In contrast, the Masses emerge from the class struggles and industrial revolution, a transition that results in the 'technification of society' and the rise of a mass society. This societal change has significant implications, including media's increasing influence over an increasingly fragmented and isolated audience.

Based on Ortega y Gasset's analysis of mass society, Jesús Timoteo Álvarez qualifies "mass society" by examining its relationship with technical development and liberal democracy. Álvarez identifies four key factors that contribute to the emergence and characteristics of mass society:

1. Democratization and Political Awareness: Álvarez emphasizes the role of democratization and the increasing political awareness of the majority. By 1914, Europe saw the consolidation of parliamentary systems, and universal suffrage began to symbolize political egalitarianism.

2. Industrial Development, Demographic, and Urban Growth The population increase led to significant rural-to-urban migration as people moved from rural areas to cities. Industrial development created large urban populations and a new class of consumers, contributing to a mass society characterized by vast social groups.

3. Strengthening of states, including the expansion of civil service and the consolidation of political elites. As states grew more robust, they played a more central role in managing and organizing society, contributing to the development and maintenance of mass society.

4. The New Role of Information in Society. The fourth factor is the transformation in the role of information within society. The development of the press as a powerful tool for political awareness and public discourse is highlighted as an important element. The press, often referred to as the "Fourth Estate," became crucial in shaping public opinion and contributing to urban culture, including the emergence of counterculture movements that challenged prevailing norms.

Building on this perspective, Umberto Eco explores the concept of Mass Culture. In this scenario, the working class engages with cultural models they see as expressions of their autonomy and identity, thus consuming and internalizing their cultural outputs. In contrast, the educated bourgeoisie, who view themselves as custodians of authentic culture—rooted in the Western Canon and spanning three centuries of tradition since the French Revolution—perceive Mass Culture as a fundamentally different and inferior subculture.

Eco identified three distinct currents in the discourse on mass culture: Integrated, Apocalyptic, and Critical. These currents offer different perspectives on the role and impact of mass media and culture in contemporary society:

- The **Integrated** current represents a more optimistic view of mass culture, an integral part of modern life that reflects and reinforces social values. Mass culture is often viewed as a progressive force facilitating a more equitable distribution of cultural content. It challenges the notion that mass culture is inherently tied to capitalism. Instead, it is seen as a significant means of cultural diffusion, making a wide array of cultural products accessible to broader audiences. However, this widespread dissemination also brings about the indiscriminate use of information, which can blur the lines between relevant data and mere entertainment. Despite this, mass culture remains vital for spreading cultural knowledge and engaging diverse populations.

- **Apocalyptic:** Mass media is perceived as a heterogeneous medium, targeting audiences that may lack social, critical, and aesthetic awareness. This view holds that mass culture tends to blur the essence of cultural content, leading to its trivialization.
- **Critical:** The Critical current advocates for an informed and analytical approach to understanding mass culture.