Chapter 19
Rethinking Mass Communication Theories in the Internet Era

Bruce Mutsvairo
University of Twente, The Netherlands

Louis Klamroth
Amsterdam University College, The Netherlands

Simon Columbus
Amsterdam University College, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This study examines three classical theories of mass communication to support a hypothesis suggesting that in the age of Internet, these theories are fast becoming extraneous. Theories to be analysed are the cultivation, agenda-setting, and media systems dependence theories. By interviewing over 100 university students based at Amsterdam University College, the authors hope to establish their media behaviours and practices, effectively verifying or disproving the argument that Web technology is masterminding a new revolution, which is uncharacteristically making these theories null and void.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of new media technologies has been celebrated and equally censured world over. Indeed, new media has expansively altered the way information is shared, providing an unsurpassed platform for interactive communication. To this end, media deterministic theorists including Marshall McLuhan have solidly maintained that

media, backed by technological advancement, carries an exponentially increasing impact on societies. McLuhan's 'medium is the message' thesis robustly backed this claim. Some theories of mass communication on the other hand have offered simplistic explanation that enlightens us on media's dominating impact on the social order. However, the advent of new technologies such as blogging, we concluded, stood in the way of an aptly gasconading two-way relationship between mass media and media audiences. Armed with

empirical data obtained through questionnaire interviews with Netherlands-based University students, we were keen on carefully excogitating the media dominance discourse.

Post-World War theories of mass communication such as the magic bullet theory have historically dominated media effects studies. While this theory was specifically left out of this study for reasons clearly spelt out later in the research, we question whether other theories' traditional assumption that mass media has a compelling influence on the passive mass audience can be corroborated. The magic bullet theory, Burger argues, sought to confirm the media's ability to powerfully 'shoot' or 'inject' messages designed to trigger a desired response. Radio and television ubiquity coupled with Hitler's rise to power paved way for the theory's overall acceptance. But with the upsurge of the Internet, citizens have more alternative sources of news, thereby proving the theory and indeed others such as the media dependence, agenda-setting and cultivation theories have a less lasting effect on the audiences. Our research thus probed the ostensibly overpowering impact of the mass media from a theoretical perspective based on a hypothesis that stated new media technologies have inordinately reduced media supremacy. The methodology part presents arguments for using questionnaires as a primary data collection methodology. The next part introduces the reader to the three theories of mass communication that were comprehensively examined in this study. That part will be followed by a discussion of research findings.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research interviews attempt to ascertain the meaning of people's experiences on a particular subject (Steinar Kvale, 1996, p. 15). Interviews also enable researchers to acquire information that they otherwise cannot obtain by observation alone. (Arthur Asa Burger, 2000,

p. 111). On the contrary, structured interview questionnaires or surveys can also quantitatively help determine or estimate future events. As noted above, this research sought to establish the influence of mass communication theories in a digitalized contemporary Western society. Despite our notable belief that mass media has a near-permanent capability to influence audiences, we were also convinced the advent of the Internet has notably weakened this invincibility. Questionnaire interviews were thus used in a mixed method study to verify our hypothesis thanks to their ability to use large sample sizes for generating generalisable results. Our central aim was to get accurate audience beliefs and attitudes on the use of Internet as a source of news, the results of which were then analysed to establish whether they contradicted or supported the notion that mass communication theories are fast losing their influence in the digital era.

Data Collection

A Web-based questionnaire was our prime data collection tool. Several factors were considered before deciding to administer questionnaires. Since our aim was to get a large sample size, we were convinced questionnaires would inexpensively reach out to a bigger audience. Concerned a low response rate would have an appalling effect on the research, we were certain the use of a questionnaire would help us reach our targets. Other factors, including scholarly-suggested views on the convenient use of questionnaires and the possibility of getting accurate and honesty reflections also persuaded us to use questionnaires. (Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, Keith Morrison, 2000, p. 245 to 264) We chose to use unstructured questionnaires because based on experience, they tend to potentially provoke a true reflection of the participants' opinions, attitudes, perceptions and feelings on a particular subject. Also, as Beri argues, unstructured questionnaires facilitate the informal conducting an in-depth interview. (GC

10 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/rethinking-mass-communication-theories-internet/63839

Related Content

Comparing U.S. & Japanese Companies on Competitive Intelligence, IS Support, and Business Change

Tor Guimaraes, Osamu Satoand Hideaki Kitanaka (1999). *Journal of Global Information Management (pp. 41-49).*

www.irma-international.org/article/comparing-japanese-companies-competitive-intelligence/51335

E-Readiness and Successful E-Commerce Diffusion in Developing Countries

Alemayehu Molla (2008). *Global Information Technologies: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 239-255).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/readiness-successful-commerce-diffusion-developing/18965

Interactions Between Culture, Regulatory Structure, and Information Privacy Across Countries

Peter Meso, Solomon Negashand Philip F. Musa (2021). *Journal of Global Information Management (pp. 1-14).*

www.irma-international.org/article/interactions-between-culture-regulatory-structure-and-information-privacy-across-countries/280346

Architectural View of an App for Walking Through a City in a Safe Way

Aldo Alexis Pérez Vizcarra, Guadalupe Paulina Anccasi Figueroa, Jaison Willian Torres Chanaand Francisco José García-Peñalvo (2021). *Information Technology Trends for a Global and Interdisciplinary Research Community (pp. 224-251).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/architectural-view-of-an-app-for-walking-through-a-city-in-a-safe-way/270008

An Improved BPNN Algorithm Based on Deep Learning Technology to Analyze the Market Risks of A+H Shares

Yi Wu, Delong Zhu, Zijian Liuand Xin Li (2022). *Journal of Global Information Management (pp. 1-23).*

www.irma-international.org/article/an-improved-bpnn-algorithm-based-on-deep-learning-technology-to-analyze-the-market-risks-of-ah-shares/293277