COURSE CODE: MAC 215
COURSE TITLE: THEORIES OF MASS COMMUNICATION
NUMBER OF UNITS: 2 UNITS
COURSE DURATION: Two hours per week
COURSE LECTURER: DR. ATE ASAN ANDREW

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the completion of this course, students are expected to:

1. Define the theory
2. Understanding the process of arriving at a theory
3. Understand types of theories
4. Know how to apply the theories in different political settings
5. Know how to formulate the theory

COURSE DETAILS

Week 1-2: *Understanding theories, how to arrive at theories*
Week 3-4: *Normative Theories.*
Week 5-6: *Working Theories*
Week 7-8: *Communication Models*
Week 9-10: *Theories of Persuasion and Media violence*
Week 11: *Common sense Theory*
Week 12: *Revision*

RESOURCES

- Griffin, E. M. (2012). A First Look at Communication Theory. (8th Edition). New York: McGrawHill. www.hhe.com
- McQuail, D (2010). McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (6th Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage
- **http://www.edouniversity.edu.ng/oer/masscomp/mac215.pdf**
- Folarin, B. (1998). Theories of Mass Communication: An Introduction. Ibadan: Stirling Holden (Nig.) Ltd.
- Ate A.A. (Undated). Theories of Mass Communication. Ikeji-Arakeji: JABU

Assignments & Grading

For group assignments, team work is encouraged but each member must participate.

• Homeworks + Project: ~ 30% of final grade.

• **Exams:**

• Final, comprehensive (according to university schedule): ~ 70% of final grade

• **NO LATE HOMEWORKS ACCEPTED**

• Turn in what you have at the time it's due.

• All homeworks are due at the start of class.

• If you will be away, turn in the homework early.

PREAMBLE:

Mass communication theories describe the relationship between the media and the society. Theories are dynamic and are subject to change depending on certain variables. That accounts to the postulations of different theories by experts at different times.

UNDERSTANDING A THEORY

A theory according to Daramola (2003, p. 36) is a systematic and deductive way of thinking about reality in order to describe and understand such reality.

According to McQuail (1983), a theory consists of a set of ideas of varying status and origin which seek to explain or interpret some phenomenon. Some scholars look at a theory as making meaning out of nothing. Through theories, sense or meaning can be made out of disturbing situations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A THEORY

The following characteristics of a typical theory were outlined by Folarin (1998, p.3-4):

1. Intellectual rigour: a typical theory must be involved in obvious intellectual rigour that they become testable, verifiable or systematic.

2. Dynamism: a theory is subject to change, it is not immutable or dogmatic.

3. Economy: in a theory, words are few as postulations are summarized for easy comprehension of the people.

HOW TO ARRIVE AT THEORIES

A. **Steps at arriving at a theory:** A theory passes through the following steps;

    i.   Conception.

    ii.   Operationalization.

    iii.   Observation.

    iv.   Analysis.

    v.   Testing.

    vi.   Generalization.

    vii.   Theory.

    viii. Law.

B. **Differentiating theory from myth, dogma, philosophy or belief:**

    i.   Myth- While myth employ stories and mystery, theories are built on concrete facts and have traceable origins.

    ii.   Dogma- dogma is a belief based on tradition and authority. It is rigid and static, however, theories are based on logic and common sense therefore it is flexible and reliable.

    iii.   Belief/philosophy- while philosophy addresses the questions of value, theory deals with what obtains and why.

KINDS OF THEORIES

On a general perspective, McQuail (1983) identifies 4 types of theories namely:

    a. Normative theory.

    b. Working theory.

    c. Social scientific theory.

d. Common sense theory.

NORMATIVE THEORY: It ties the operation of the mass media to the political environment in which the media operates. According to Daramola (2003, p. 40), the basic assumption of normative theories is that "the mass media reflect and are conditioned by the nature of society in which they operate". There are 4 theories of the press, these are:

i.   Authoritative theory

ii.   Libertarian theory

iii.   Social responsibility theory

iv.   Soviet-communist theory

        McQuail (1989) added two more theories, they are:

v.   Development media theory

vi.   Democratic-Participant media theory.

i.   Authoritative theory

The authoritative theory dates from the 16th Century. It describes a situation in which the media mass media are subordinated to state power whether the media ownership is private or public.

Some of the instrument of authoritative control of the media include heavy taxation, regressive legislation, direct or subtle state control of staffing, etc.

ii.   Libertarian theory or free press theory

This theory believes that an individual should be free to publish what he or she likes to hold and express opinion freely.

However it doesn't obliterate the laws of defamation, sedition, obscenity and invasion of privacy.

It is clearly expressed in the American constitution which infringes on freedom of speech or of the press.

According to Daramola (2003, p.2) some principles of libertarian theory are:
- There should be no compulsion to any theory
- No restriction should be placed on collection of information for publication provided it is done by legal means.

He describes libertarian theory as the bedrock of print media in democratic society.

iii.   Social responsibility theory

This theory places emphasis on the moral and social responsibilities of people and institutions which operate the mass media.

Experts like Siebert et al (1954), Kunzick (1988), McQuail (1987) cited by Folarin outlines the basic tenets of social responsibility theory
- To serve the political system by making information of public affairs generally accessible.
- To protect the rights of the individual by acing as watch dog over the government.
- To serve the economic system
- To provide good entertainment

Professor John Meril identifies three roads to social responsibility theory:
- That which is defined by the individual
- That which is defined by the professional bodies

- That which is defined by the society.

iv.   Soviet-Communist Theory

The main task of the press under this theory is to promote socialist ideologist and system and maintain the sovereignty of the proletariat through the communist party.

v.   Development Media Theory

This theory was put forward as a means of paying for the imbalance in development and information flow of the third world countries and a solution to the technological problems facing them.

The major tenets of development media theory as enunciated by McQuail are:

- Media must accept and carry out positive development task in line with naturally established policies.
- Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs of the society
- In the interest of development the state has a right to intervene or restrict media operations.

Features of the third world countries that make it difficult to apply normative theories:

- Absence of requisite communication infrastructure
- Limited supply of requisite professional skills
- Limited availability of media literate audiences
- Dependence on developed world for technology skills and cultural products.

vi.   Democratic Participant Media Theory

McQuail (1983) and Kunzick (1988) are major experts of this theory. The theory reflects public reaction against commercialization and monopolization of privately owned media and grown at the bottlenecks in public broadcasting institutions.

According to Folarin (1998), the theory viewed broadcasting as being too elitist, rigid in structure and being manipulated by those in government.

WORKING THEORIES

These theories consist of basic guidelines, techniques, traditions and conventions that guide the world of media production and give it consistency over time.

The Gatekeeping Process

Gate keeping amounts to serenity of the information to be disseminated. A gate keeper not only decides which occurrences come to public awareness but also influences the ways in which those occurrences are perceived through the kind of editorial treatment given to them.

Factors affecting gatekeeping conditions:

- Timing
- Ownership pattern
- Management policy
- Perceived needs and preferences of the audience
- Availability of photographers or film footage
- Perceived needs and preference of the audience.

News Value

The term "news value" was first used by Walter Lipman in 1922. News value refers to the criteria by which news is selected. They are intuitive assumptions of journalists about what interest their audience.

Why bad news is good news.

Wilke (1984) cited by Kunczick (1988:151) identifies four possible reasons why bad news usually gets preferences in media reporting:

1. Because bad news satisfies the frequency criterion better
2. More people are likely to agree on the interpretation of a bad occurrence than on the interpretation of a good event
3. Negative news is more unexpected than positive news
4. Negative news is said to be more constant with at least some dominant images of our time

SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC THEORY
Communication Models

A model according to Folarin (1998) is a symbolic representation designed to help visualize the relationship among various elements of a structure, system or process, for the purpose of discussion and analysis.

Describing a model as a device representing the essential features of a given phenomenon, Daramola (2005) outlines the advantages of a model:

- First, models help to clarify the structure of complex events
- Second, models provide a frame of reference for scientific inquiry
- Third, models are heuristic stimulus, that is, they crystalise new ideas and new ways of looking at things
- Lastly, models help make predictions about the real world. They do not only describe the "what" of communication but they also help to explain the "why" in such a way that we can talk about the future.

The shortcoming of a model is that it is only a means to an end and not an end in itself. It presents a selective or partial picture of a reality and not a holistic picture.

We shall revisit Shannon and Weaver model (1949) and Lasswell Model (1948).

The Shannon-Weaver Model.

Shannon and Weaver produced a general model of communication known after them as the Shannon-Weaver Model. It involved breaking down an information system into sub-systems so as to evaluate the efficiency of various communication channels and codes. The model proposes that all communication must include six elements:

- Source
- Encoder
- Channel
- Message
- Decoder
- Receiver

This model is often referred to as an '**information model**' of communication. A drawback is that the model looks at communication as a one-way process. That is remedied by the addition of the feedback loop. Noise indicates those factors that disturb or otherwise influence messages as they are being transmitted

The Lasswell Model (1948)

This model is referred to as an interrogatory model because it has questions such as:

- Who?
- Says what?
- In which channel?
- To whom?
- With what effect?

Lasswell attempted to analyse the process of communication in terms of the function performed by it in every human society. He cites the functions as:

- Surveillance of the environment

- Correlation of different parts of the socity in making a response or presenting a solution to problems, and

- Transmission of the social heritage from one generation to another. This is the education or socialization function of the media. Laswell asserted that there were groups of specialists who were responsible for carrying out the functions.

Theories of Media Effects

The Instinctive S-R Theory

The Post-Instinctive S-R Theory

The Individual Difference Perspective

The Social Categories Perspective

The Social Relations Perspective

The Two-Step Flow Theory/Hypothesis

Minimally Powerful Media Theories

1. Selective Processes: This perspective on how humans "see" the world is based on individual differences of upbringing, race, gender, socioeconomic status, life experiences. Individuals are exposed to different experiences and influences—some profound (like nationality or gender) and some subtle (like bigtown/smalltown)—that help shape how they see and make sense of the world, people, issues, culture, society. The result of these differences is that people perceive and interpret the world differently. Recognizing shared perceptions of the world is essential to understanding how individuals form communities.

• *Selective Exposure:* Based on how we see the world, individuals tend to pay attention to different kinds of information that is more or less relevant and familiar to their own experience. This concept also relates to the media choices we make—which news sources we read & view (e.g., Fox News or PBS News Hour, NPR or Rush

Limbaugh, *Salt Lake Tribune* or *Deseret News*), entertainment viewing (TV, movies—*Dexter* or *CSI*, *Girl with the Dragon Tatto* or Disney), music (Dixie Chicks or Toby Keith). The media choices we make influence our perception of reality.

• ***Selective Perception:*** As a result of these difference background and formative influences, as well as media choices, individuals see and make sense of the world differently; we all create our own meanings of events around us, filtering information that reaches us through our own prejudices and prior knowledge, framing information so that it makes sense in our own context.

• ***Selective Retention:*** Some information flies right past us; some sticks. We tend to remember best the information that confirms our beliefs and values, and forget the information that contradicts our values and beliefs.

Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses and gratification theory seeks to understand why people seek out the media that they do and what they use it for. UGT differs from other media effect theories in that it assumes that individuals have power over their media usage, rather than positioning individuals as passive consumers of media. UGT explores how individuals deliberately seek out media to fulfill certain needs or goals such as entertainment, relaxation, or socializing.

Modern-Day Applications

Today, UGT has more relevance than ever as a tool for understanding how we as individuals connect with the technologies around us. These technologies span everything from the Internet to video gaming to mobile phones. UGT research into mobile phone usage has found that people seek a number of gratifications from their phones, including affection/sociability, entertainment, and mobility, among others. As another example of a contemporary technology, when using social media, users can be motivated by factors like a need to vent negative feelings, recognition, and cognitive needs. Animated news and entertainment media are just two other examples of media technologies that UGT researchers continue to explore.

Theory Criticism

UGT has been plagued almost from its inception by criticisms that it does not meet the standards necessary to be a theory. Common criticisms include the fact that gratifications are more dependent on researchers' input than on the subjects', that audiences of different ages will have different motivations for watching the same media, and that much of the information collected in studies is self-reported, and as such, difficult to measure. Despite the criticism, UGT may be more relevant and useful today as media users now have hundreds of TV channels, the internet, and a whole array of other media entertainment options that help solidify the argument that the individual has agency over their media consumption.

Conditionally Powerful Media Theories

Agenda-Setting

This theory holds that although the mass media can't tell us what to think, the media are stunningly successful at telling us what to think about. That is, through their selection or de-selection of what is "news" (gatekeeping), the mass media serve to create an agenda for social discourse. When there were only three major national TV networks, and some 70-80% of Americans watched them nightly, a very clear national agenda of what's most important was created. Even in such a monopolistic and dominated mass media system, the networks couldn't make people think in certain ways (because of individual selective perception), but they were and are able to focus attention of some issues while ignoring others. (The Project Censored story is an illustration of what stories did not make the public's agenda/consciousness.) Examples of how agenda-setting worked in society include: The OJ Simpson murder trial; the Clinton impeachment hearings following Zippergate; WMDs and the Iraq War/War on Terrorism. Consider the implications of agenda-setting for public policy debate and creation of laws. Another question: Who sets the agenda for the media agenda-setters?

Other theories include:

- **Cultural Norms Theory**

- **Mainstreaming or Synchronisation Theory**

- **"Knowledge Gaps" Theory**

- **Spiral of Silence**

<center>**Persuasion Theories**</center>

Cognitive Dissonance

Explanation of Theory:

This theory of Cognitive Dissonance says that human beings often have conflicting beliefs with actions they take, or other beliefs they have. This dissonance creates a tension and tension reduction is automatically sought by changing our evaluations by some degree. Cognitive Dissonance is when you have two good choices and you make your decision then you find yourself unsure or in doubt about the choice you made. You might have to downplay the other choice in order to reassure yourself.

Theorist: Leon Festinger

Date: 1962

Social Judgement Theory

Explanation of Theory:

Social Judgement theory states that you have a statement or message and you accept it or reject it based on your cognitive map. You accept or reject a message based on one's own ego-involvement and if it falls within their latitude of acceptance.

Theorist: MuzaferSherif, Carolyn Sherif, Carl Hovland

Date: 1961

Critique:
Social Judgement theory proposes the idea that persuasion is a two-step process. The first step involves individuals hearing or reading a message and immediately evaluating where the message falls within their own position. The second step involves individuals adjusting their particular attitude either toward or away from the message they heard.

Ideas and Implications:

Individuals have three zones in which they accept or reject specific messages or attitudes. The latitude of acceptance zone is where individuals place attitudes they consider acceptable. The latitude of rejection zone is where individuals place attitudes they consider unacceptable or objectionable. The latitude of noncommitment is where people place attitudes they find neither acceptable nor rejectable.

Example:

Example of Social Judgement theory:

Read through these statements and recognize the variety of opinions they represent;
1. Student athletes should be given extra time to complete assignments.
2. Student athletes are for the most part lazy when it comes to schoolwork.
3. Student athletes should receive more time to complete assignments because their schedule is more hectic than the average student.
4.Student athletes should be treated like every other student.
5. Athletes should be able to skip class because they are tired from practices or games.
6. Professors should take extra time to tutor those student athletes who miss class. Now, reread through these questions again and underline the statement that most closely represents your opinion, and run a line through the statement that is most objectionable. Circle the statements you think are reasonable, and cross out the statements you reject. Social Judgement theory predicts that people hear a message and they immediately decide whether they accept, reject, or remain noncommitted on the message.

Inoculation Theory

Explanation of Theory:

Inoculation theory states that inoculation is used to describe the attribution of greater resistance to individuals. Or, the process of supplying information to receivers before the communication process takes place in hopes that the information would make the receiver more resistant.

Theorist: William McGuire

Date:1961

Primary Article:

McGuire, W. (1961). Resistance to persuasion conferred by active and passive prior refutation of the same and alternative counterarguments. Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 63, 326-332.

Rank's Persuasion Model

Explanation of Theory:

*Rank's model of persuasion states that persuaders use two major strategies to achieve their goals. These strategies are nicely set into two main schemas known as (1) **intensify**, and (2) **downplay**.*

Theorist: Hugh Rank

Date: 1976

Source Credibility Theory

Explanation of Theory:

The Source Credibility theory states that people are more likely to be persuaded when the source presents itself as credible. The theory is broken into three models that can be used to more aptly apply the theory. The names of those models are: the factor model, the functional model, and the constructivist model.

Theorist: Hovland, C., Janis, I., Kelley, H.

Date: 1953

Primary Article:

Hovland, C.I., Janis, I.L., & Kelley, H.H. (1953).Communication and Persuasion. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Congruity Theory

Explanation of Theory:

The Congruity theory predicts that if there are two contradicting people, sets of information, or concepts on which a judgment must be made by a single observer, the observer will experience pressure to change his or her judgment on one of the sides. However, if the two sets of information are similar or congruent, then there will be no problem, and the observer will not experience pressure of any form.

Theorist: Osgood, C., &Tannenbaum, P.

Date: 1955

Reinforcement Theory

Explanation of Theory:

Attitude changes result from an opinion change produced through reinforcement in areas such as attention, comprehension and acceptance.

Theorist: Hovland, Janis and Kelly

Date: 1967

Elaboration Likelihood Model

Explanation of Theory:

There are two routes to persuasion -- the central route and the peripheral route. The central route uses message elaboration, and can produce a major positive attitude change, while the peripheral route uses six different message irrelevant cues to illicit a quick response with a minor shift in attitude.

Theorist: Petty and Cacioppo

Date: 1986

Attribution Theory

Explanation of Theory:

Attribution Theory attempts to explain causes of behavior. It attempts to explain the causes of people's behavior and attributing or explaining reasons as to why people behave the way they do. **Theorists: Heider Date: 1958**