

Communication theory has emerged media essay



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Different schools of thought have defined communication in many ways.

Renowned scholar, G. G. Brown defines communication as: ...transfer of information from one person to another, whether or not it elicits confidence. But the information transferred must be understandable to the receiver. On the other hand, Fred G. Meyer defines communication as: “ the intercourse by words, letters or messages”. Nonetheless, the central theme in all these definitions is the exchange and flow of information between two or more parties. This may result to the use of both verbal and non-verbal cues.

Evidently, communication affects human livelihood and its behaviour and there is need to demonstrate how it affects individual actions. Thus, an introspection of how communication theory has emerged from the pre-christian era to modern times responds to the need of explaining individual actions. The history of communication dates back to time immemorial, with significant variation in communication technologies evolving in tandem with shifts in socio-political and economic systems. Various modes of communication have subsequently emerged with the passage of time and technological advancements. On the other hand, we are still able to trace the history of communication to oral and written speech.

An insight into how communication theory came into being is demonstrated in the Holy Bible. In the Old Testament book of Genesis chapter one, verse three, it reads: “...And God said, “ Let there be light,” and there was light...” This expression of communication serves to show that communication existed since time immemorial. God was able to undertake creation through His speech. Again, further credence to the foundation of communication theory presents itself in the New Testament through the book of John chapter

one, verses one to two; “ In the beginning there was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.” Once God created man, He was able to connect with him by words. This is revealed through the stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham, Noah, Moses and many others in the bible. Further, God communicated with prophets, and his people through visions, dreams, words, signs and symbols.

Notably, the Old Testament portrays the usage of communication through figures of speech, especially through metaphors. Metaphors were widely used to intimate deeper meaning in speech and writing. This attribute is well observed in the books of Proverbs and Psalms. As such, the pre-Christian era was well founded in communication through language use and its mastery. The same applies to the Christian era as well which derives much of its communication foundation from language mastery. This is well exemplified through Jesus parables.

Aside from the religious views of communication theory, there is also the philosophical basis for communication theory. The proponents of this school of thought are mainly Greek philosophers and historians ranging from Aristotle, Isocrates, Socrates and Plato. From their insights emerged the theory of rhetoric. Despite both Isocrates and Sophists maintaining that rhetoric’s objective is persuasion, Isocrates promoted its use for human improvement while Sophists held the view that rhetoric’s purpose was for self-praise and thrift. Given the divergent views on the purpose of rhetoric, Plato also weighed in on the matter showing favour to dialectic than to the manner of oral presentation. As such, he favoured the use of reason and rationality in arguments. On the other hand, Aristotle sought to chart a

defining measure to communication theory as the mode by which a person interacts with his/her audience.

Due to the insights of the aforementioned philosophers, rhetorical theory has developed to become a solid basis by which communication is defined in many sectors. Persuasion of individuals by communication extends beyond politics, media, journalism and even religion. This is achieved through the use of Aristotle's Rhetoric principles which include invention, arrangement, style, persuasion and memory.

Despite there being many classes of communication theories, including the seven traditions (classical rhetoric, semiotics, phenomenological, cybernetic, social psychology, sociocultural communication, and critical traditions), three major classifications can be adopted by mode of influence; Rhetoric theory as a result of the influence of oratory speech; social communication theories resulting from socio-political changes; and theories of mass communication as a result of journalism spread. In its modern form today, rhetoric theory is interrelated with traditional forms of communication theory, e. g. semiotics. Through the propagation of "text" in print media or "images" in visual media, which are both sign elements, the mass audience is able to be persuaded along cultural lines. As such, signs and symbols are continually employed in oratory speech to move masses and influence their perception of issues.

On the socio-political scope, theories such as Authoritarian, Free press, Communist and Social responsibility are notable. These theories help explain communication theory evolution in the wake of various social-

political changes in the society. Significantly, these theories focussed on the beginning of information dissemination to large population groups and the accompanying influence on the political class e. g. the governments. Again, they pronounce some of the social plights and classification within society attributed to information access. As authoritarian leadership was the norm before the widespread prevalence of print media, governments took it upon themselves to restrict flow of information to the common people, and as such, freedom of expression was strictly guarded. Consequently, the elite class would deprive the common people the right to information and access through controlling media sources. As a result therefore, print media was in low circulation and only accessible to the few due its then high price.

Nevertheless, with the clamour for free will in the 17th century, Libertarianism/Free press took over. This was significantly influenced by the emergence of print media which in time became affordable to the common populace and reflective of their views which were previously gagged under authoritarian leadership.

On the other hand, as free press offered an avenue for expression of free will, it was noted to be devoid of social responsibility. This necessitated the need for checks and balances, especially with the development of other communication media such as radio, television and film. Social responsibility therefore advocated for accountability through government and self regulation in order to promote social welfare and equity. Free press was further limited by the communist theory which promoted media control in the guise of “ effective press freedom”. Consequently, the media’s role was to educate but not to inform the general populace. In addition, the

population was expected to post opinion on issues covered by the media so as to foster the so-called "greater press freedom" and institute greater audience participation. In effect therefore, the Communist theory was associated as a counter to capitalism trend where the media was in the control of a few media elites and only serving their interests.

However, the 20th century marked a dramatic shift in communication theory evolution. This was brought about by advancement in communication technology to spur the spread of journalism. Notable events that defined this spread included the occurrence of the World Wars which depicted the strength of information pre-, during, and post war. Information was a tool in itself during the warring period and as such, theories were formulated once validated. This was articulated through stimulus response theory, propaganda and many more theories. Stimulus response theory took note that mass media has a significant effect on individuals' perception of issues and in response, people would normally subject themselves to viewership that conforms to their beliefs and attitudes. Propaganda theory on the other hand was used to great effect to spreading rumours and falsehoods either in favour or disfavour of a certain person or group of persons. Evidently, it was during the World Wars and in the political sphere that propaganda is commonly used. Derived from rhetoric theory, propaganda's main objective is persuasion in order to influence people's perception of issues at hand. Nonetheless, in the modern day setting, propaganda is also employed in advertising, marketing and socio-economic conflicts.

Again, technological advancement brought with it new media of communication e. g. television, computer, mobile phones, radio and other

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forms such as internet and social networking. These media served to spread journalism through provision of information of news and information for public consumption. A number of theories were hence formulated to describe this phenomenon, viz: Agenda setting theory, two-step flow theory, diffusion of innovation theory and uses and gratification theory.

Agenda setting theory explains a very highly effective impact of the media – the ability to inform the population about essential issues. Agenda setting hypothesizes that communication consists of information and awareness. Therefore in community discussion, media interaction has an influence on community understanding of various issues. These may range from state policies, economic system, and other community issues. As a result, a classification of agenda-setting emerges; Policy-agenda setting, Media-agenda setting and public agenda-setting. Under public-agenda-setting, the public's viewpoint shows the key issues of concern; Media agenda setting shows the significance and depth of news items being covered in relation to their coverage in various media stations; Policy agenda-setting points to the influence that a reported issue has on policy makers. In effect therefore, Agenda setting has led to the prominence of the “ CNN Effect” whereby 24-hour news channels set the international news agenda. In fact, locals in the developing nations view their news items captured in these channels as being of very prime importance.

Nonetheless, Agenda setting is based on thinking that media does not necessarily indicate reality; they narrow it down and shape it; media focus on a few problems and topics bring the community to understand those problems as more essential than other problems. For this reason, agenda-

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setting helps individuals comprehend the role of the media in shaping news items and issues for public consumption. This is well exemplified by how media stations, publishers and news anchors set the news agenda and consequently, viewers affix much significance to the amount of broadcasted information and its position in the broadcast.

The two-step theory theorizes how casual relationships play a part in changing the way in which individuals take up relevant information from media campaigns. Consequently, the primary source of information for the public is normally the newspaper and radio segments, whose information bits is adopted by opinion leaders who further relay the information to the less active segment of the society. In effect therefore, informal social groupings have some influence on society information uptake and dictate which information is worth sharing.

Diffusions of Innovations theory explains the mode by which a new concept or exercise is conveyed to individuals through certain communication programs over time. Consequently, the selected mode of transfer assists in explaining the aspects that impact individuals' ideas and activities.

Therefore, the media selected as well as cultural interaction provide information that impacts common or well-known viewpoints. The diffusions process is therefore the procedure by which technological advancement is conveyed through certain media over a certain period among individuals in a social system. An illustration of how diffusions of innovation theory is prominent is through social media e. g. the youth accessing information and news in the internet mode via facebook.

Another notable viewpoint of journalism spread mass communication in the modern times is the Uses and Gratification theory. This concept describes the uses and features of the press for diverse user groups ranging from the people, and the community in general. In order to describe how people use mass journalism to please their needs, the theory: seeks what people do with the medial; identifies their intentions for particular media use; and examines the individual effect of a particular media use. The main underlying factor of the theory is the supposition that individuals constantly seek a media channel to fulfil personal needs. Consequently, a medium is frequently used when the current purposes to use the medium results in more gratification.

In light of the evolution of communication theory from pre-Christian era to the modern times, it is definite that communication has evolved over time. Its mystery is captured in God's creation act and its complexity has been researched by various scholars. The Greek philosophers made wise attempts in its definition which apparently form the cornerstone of today's knowledge. On the other hand, global socio-political events and transformation have further shaped communication theory development. And yet, as technology continues to advance, further definitions of communication shall continue to be formulated to track its changes with time.