

Mcquail's communications theory



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In the theoretical field of communication studies, the works are often heavily influenced and led by Western-oriented perspectives. In this essay, we shall explore the various media texts in Singapore and analyze the extent to which it relates to McQuail's communication theory. Comparing the influence of mass media to the early century, McQuail D. (2002) associates the first concept of communication to the teachings' and guidance towards the masses through propaganda. This transmission perception is communication at its simplest level.

In this model, the major concern is to dispatch the message regardless of the receiver having reached an understanding with the source and hence omitting feedback. For example, it is evident in the philosophy of education; a lecturer passes on information to his students (Grossberg, L. , 2006). The primary purpose of this model is to send a message across for the intention of control or influence (McQuail D. , 1997). Based on that notion, we can observe a similar pattern in the local television program, " Don't Ignore Diabetes". It is a 30-minutes educational TV show that airs on Channel 5 every Monday.

In each episode, the show gives tips and investigates the various truths and myths behind Diabetes, with the help of its resident doctor, Dr. Talk. This example illustrates a transmission of a message (information about Diabetes) from a source (Dr. Talk or the TV Host) to a receiver (the audience). The main purpose of this television program is to pass on knowledge, in this case referring to the dangers and raising awareness towards Diabetes, to the public. As the message is relayed from a person with credible knowledge, this model assumes that the effect of the

message is reasonably direct between the sender and the receiver (Grossberg, L. 2006). Since it focuses on one-way communication, there is no feedback as the audience is perceived as a target for the transmission of meaning. As we look at the next concept of communication, the ritual model, the "receivers" are treated as participants. With the Internet, it opens up a new dimension for public discussions of media content which in turn increases the commonality between the "sender" and "receiver", rather than in swaying the receivers in accordance to the motive of the sender (McQuail D. 1997).

I will associate this theory to a local blogger, Wendy Cheng. Wendy is considered one of Singapore's most popular blogging sensations. Her weblog, which is hosted on <http://xixue.blogspot.com>, attracts an impressive amount of visitors each day. Moreover, a careful observation of her site will reveal a remarkable number of comments in response to her blog posts. The nature of a community generally gives an impression of an environment of trust and respect that gathers a group of like-minded individuals who share similar opinions and goals (Conrad, D. , 2005).

As a blogger, she is driven to document her personal life, provide and express her emotions and commentaries through writing (Nard', B. A. , Schiano, D. J. , Gumbrecht, M. , Swartz, L. , 2004). Unlike the transmission model, this forms a participatory culture among the readers of the blog as it provides them with an opportunity to join in the discussion. Just like any celebrity, Wendy is bound to have readers who simply dislike her or do not share her sentiments on her more controversial entries. This demonstrates the core perception of ritual communication as it concentrates on meanings (Sella, Z. K. , 2007).

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The catch in this theory is that it solely depends on the individual's willingness to be a part of the "community". For instance, a reader may choose to avoid visiting Wendys blog if he has an aversion towards her opinions. The example of blogs is also relevant under McQuail's third concept of communication, the display model. The theory seeks to simply gain the attention of the audience, regardless of its effect (McQuail D. , 1997). This is because it prioritizes quantity over quality; bad publicity is not an issue in this scenario as the main purpose of the sender is to achieve as much media exposure as possible.

Taking the previous example of Wendys blog, her entries often do not fall into the good tastes of the public. As mentioned, her weblog usually covers controversial issues such as weak women, phone sex and racist topics. Recently, she was once again featured on a local newspaper for her alleged defamation of another local blogger. The feud reached a boiling point when Wendy accused her of undergoing plastic surgery and as a result, she was threatened with a lawsuit (Yong, D. , 2008).

This illustrates the key point of the display model as even though she may not hold the best reputation in the eyes of the public, she has achieved her main purpose of attracting potential readers to her blog. In this case, she was given a free publicity pass "at no cost". Although it is notable that audience is sensitive to the quality of media content, in particular, the upholding of certain norms and values present in the local community such as morality and sensitivity, it is in human nature to give in to curiosity (McQuail D. , 1997).

Finally, we have arrived at the last concept of McQuail's communication theory, the reception model. This concept places a strong emphasis on the role of the receiver, and thus the readers, in the interpretation of media texts (McQuail D. , 1997). It is slightly more critical than the previous models as it permits the audience with the power to resist and decode the media context based on their own perspectives (Grossberg, L. , 2006). Under the reception model, the audience is regarded as active rather than passive readers of media content.

This means that they are more likely to have different viewpoints regarding the same issue which will in turn welcome the prospect of feedback. As a result, the relationship between the sender and receiver becomes more interactive (McQuail D. 1997). This theory is apparent in the case of newspapers. In Singapore, approximately 50 percent of the adult population reads a newspaper at least once a day, with much more obtaining news via alternative sources such as the Internet and radio on a weekly basis (Keshishoglou, I. E. , Aquilia, P. , 2003).

A local newspaper, Singapore Today, reported on the sale of five wet markets property to one of the largest supermarket chains in Singapore, Sheng Shiong Property (Todayonline, 2009). This sparked and raised concerns among local residents as they worry about the growing trend of new supermarkets replacing the traditional wet markets. For this reason, readers wrote in to the editors to "have their say" and get their opinions published in the "Voices" section of the newspaper. As the media text is interpreted through the perceptions of its readers, the "receivers" are given the option to consent or disagree with the idea.

Likewise, in this scenario, there are people who are in support of preserving the wet markets and those who are in favor of an upgraded market. For instance, Sharma M. (2009) stands by his belief that wet markets are part of Singapore's heritage and it offer a touch of humanity in our he nostalgia of wet markets but complains about the " wetness" and the heat (Khoo, P. , 2009). He also stressed that residents will benefit from supermarkets in the long run as it provides better hygiene and economies of scale.

The continuous debate regarding this issue provides an interactive environment for the readers. Although McQuail's theory of communication does manifests in the media context of Singapore, the feasibility of his theory is limited in various ways. Issues like one's nationality and cultural background does shape a person's experience, knowledge and perception of a media text (McQuail, D. 2005). For instance, people often choose what they read based on their own views and tend to avoid messages that they find uncongenial.

This is because the intended " message" clashes with the receiver's existing social attitudes or beliefs and therefore chooses to reject the message or distort it to fit into his own perspective (Hartmann, P. , Husband, C. , 1970).

This is apparently evident in non-western cultures as our perspectives are strongly led by the culture and norms in the community. For many years, the Singapore Government has emphasize on the importance of core values as a mean to preserve our identity nd social values without being " over-westernized" or " de-culturalized" (Birch, D. , 1993).

Hence, cultural policies and communications are often created in the media, in the form of transmission model of McQuail's communication, as part of a rhetorical tool to justify various actions taken by the government (Lowe, V. 1987, p. 57). However, this does not deprive readers from giving "feedback" as the nation practices democracy. It only underlines the notion that there are signs of reality being presented as second-hand truth, in terms of its objectivity and authenticity (Baudrillard, J. 1983, p. 12). Besides, McQuail's ritual and reception concepts also prove to be useful in the development of Broadcast Television in Singapore.

With the availability of cable TV and Internet, audiences are given the chance to break away from the strict "surveillance" of media organizations in regard to media content and censorship (McQuail D. , 1997). The increase in the number of television channels allows for more variety and exposure to other overseas television programs which in turn cultivate local audiences' appetites and demands (Keshishoglou, J. E. , Aquilia, P. , 2003). Thus, it somewhat reverts the relationship between the sender and receiver as the audiences are the ones influencing programming decisions and content.

In conclusion, the significance of the four communication models in Asian-centric cultures vary depending on the social and cultural identity of the group, social relations between sender and receiver, and the types of audience; driven by social, cultural, behavior, linguistic or economic reasons (McQuail D. , 1997). It is important to note that the survival and flourishing of local or regional media is only made possible via the developments of new technologies in the areas of production and distribution.