

# Argument against uncertainty reduction theory



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Argument Against Uncertainty Reduction Theory Charles Berger founded the theory of uncertainty on an ideal that the meeting of people and specifically strangers is marked by the presence of uncertainty or doubts. He defines the theory of uncertainty as, " When people meet, their primary concern is to reduce uncertainty about each other and their relationship. As verbal output, nonverbal warmth, self-disclosure, similarity, and shared communication networks increase uncertainty decreases, and vice versa. Information seeking and reciprocity are positively correlated with uncertainty" (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975).

All social interactions according to Berger are marked by uncertainty, which is central to such interactions. The Uncertainty reduction theory by Charles Berger is a deductive causal assumption that aims at providing explanations for communicative behavior in the interpersonal episodes, as they relate to the individual inability to comprehend their own and partner's feelings or emotions. The history of uncertainty reduction theory is traceable from the axioms used to give the descriptions of the relationship between uncertainty and other factors in and affecting communication. The Uncertainty reduction theory was developed by Charles Berger and Calabrese in the year 1975 with the aim of giving descriptions to relationships between the various factors of communication within the dyadic exchanges (Boucher, & Jacobson, 2012).

The uncertainties brought about in the first encounters between strangers are based on the questions as to how such meetings will transpire; hence, it is based on lack of confidence on the part of an individual in terms of expectations of outcomes of the meeting. The level of uncertainty is

depreciable through increased interpersonal communication with other people.

Interpersonal communication is usually established in a series of patterned phases. The first stage is seeking information that pertains to demographic information such as gender, age and the social-economic status of an individual. The second phase is the personal stage whereby an individual is able to find and share information related to attitudes, beliefs, religion and individual values.

The exit stage is the concluding phase, and it describes the plans for the future interactions of an individual with a stranger. This largely depends on the outcomes of the initial encounter. People obtain information about others in several basic approaches or ways.

The means used are passive, active and interactive strategies. The passive strategies involve the use of sight or skills of observance to identify the behavior exhibited by an individual. The active strategies usually involve the use of third parties to obtain information about another person. In addition, interactive strategies usually involve the use of interrogative techniques to obtain information from the individual (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975). Message plans usually consist of the presence of goals in terms of the social interactions. Hence, social interactions could be termed as goal oriented. Message plans developed by an individual are usually the representation of the mental view of the courses of actions, which could be used to achieve the identified goals from the social interactions. The complexity of the

message plan developed is important in communication and is usually measured in two approaches.

The initial approach is a level of detail included in the plan and the presence of contingency plans incase the initial plans are unsuccessful. Uncertainty takes two distinct forms. These two forms are the presence of behavioral questions and cognitive questions. Behavioral questions are identified as questions, which are concerned with individual behavior or conduct whereas the cognitive questions arise from the need and desire to understand others. The probability of perfect communication between strangers is usually infinite. Hence, it could be assumed that first interactions between strangers are unknown in terms of predictability and perfect communication. Strangers during their initial encounter ensure that they aim at increasing their predictability and seeking explanations for occurrences during initial encounters. In addition, it also influences the relational development of an individual, such as experiences of guilt, jealousy and presence of conflict.

Hence, uncertainty is an aspect, which should be understood especially in the contexts of close relations between individuals. Romantic relations are among close relationships, which could be used to illustrate the presence of uncertainty in relationships. The context of uncertainty in romantic relationships is different in entirety from other close relationships in terms of uncertainty. High levels of uncertainty in romantic relationships lead to decreased levels of intimacy and attraction. Relationships are at times viewable as systems, which aid exchange of information that aids survival to ensure reduction of uncertainty and thus provide survival. Reduction or decline of uncertainty in romantic relationships is subsequently followed by <https://assignbuster.com/argument-against-uncertainty-reduction-theory/>

an increase in intimacy, in such relationships (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975).

Several facets or what Berger and Calabrese define as axioms of the reduction theory, highlight the axioms claimed as self evident in social interactions and communication. The first axiom is verbal communication.

According to Berger and Calabrese, verbal communication is considered as an important aspect, which increases after individuals have met. Uncertainty reduces with verbal communication, as two individuals who have met are able to share information to the other thus reducing the tension and uncertainty associated with unfamiliarity. It also subsequently increases their levels of verbal communication, as either party is eager to know more about the other individual. The second axiom is the non-verbal communication exhibited by the strangers after their first meeting. Non-verbal communication is considered as an essential aspect in terms of communication between individuals. This is usually the main part of communication as the individuals involved show their levels of uncertainty through gestures and physical position or contact.

It essentially expresses a sense of contact and affiliation between individuals. Hence, an increase in the level of nonverbal communication usually results in the reduction of uncertainty. The third axiom is the level of information exchange between strangers in their initial encounters. High levels of uncertainty in an encounter usually aid the strangers to embark on information seeking strategies that will aid in understanding and knowing the stranger better. Information seeking behavior is reflective of the level of uncertainty exhibited by an individual. An increase in the level of uncertainty

usually results in an increase, in the level of information seeking behavior (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975).

The fourth axiom is the intimacy phase, which describes the level of interpersonal interactions in depth. Uncertainty levels are lower if the level of intimacy is on the increase whereas a decrease in the levels of intimacy is usually associated with a high level of uncertainty. High levels of uncertainty usually reduce the ability of individuals involved in communication exchanges to reach a desired level of intimacy. A reduction in the level of uncertainty usually results in a subsequent urge to cultivate intimacy between individuals. Reciprocity falls as the fourth axiom of uncertainty reduction theory. It stipulates that the higher levels of uncertainty between individuals usually necessitate the need for sharing of information between individuals.

This is vital phase as it is aimed at reducing the level of uncertainty exhibited by two individuals. A reduction in the level of uncertainty usually results in the subsequent reduction of the need for reciprocal communication. In the instances of high level of uncertainty, individuals usually engage in communication with expectations of the other party to reciprocate identical communication. Self-disclosure in intimacy is essential in that individuals are expected to disclose information about them based on the level of disclosure actualized by the other party. After eventual increase in the level of intimacy, there is a reduction in the need for reciprocal communication as individuals are aware of each other in terms of feelings, intentions and behavioral aspects. The theory of uncertainty reduction is a facet of communication theories developed earlier as it aims at provision of <https://assignbuster.com/argument-against-uncertainty-reduction-theory/>

elaborate steps actualized in terms of successful communication to achieve varied desired levels of intimacy.

The theory does not however give succinct and elaborate effects after communication. Berger and Calabrese only provide uncertainty as an aspect in communication to achieve desired levels of intimacy. Uncertainty in this theory is the focus and is illustrated only in the case of initial interactions between strangers (Gal, & Rucker, 2010). Hence, the theory fails in the provision of the aspects of communication and interactions after reduction in uncertainty.

In addition, communication and social interactions continue and develop in new ways after reduction of uncertainty. Hence, this theory provides interactions from the perspective of uncertainty. Uncertainty is enhanced by the presence of possibilities in terms of the outcomes and direction of the relationships.

This unpredictability is the root of uncertainty in relationships. The notion in the uncertainty reduction theory is the assumption that initial interactions are coupled by individual expectations of the reduction in uncertainty and the subsequent increase in predictability by creating familiarity brought about by exchanges between individuals. This is derived from the assumption of Heider that people seek to make inferences or sense form various events or occurrences in their social interactions. This necessitates the use of both proactive and retroactive procedures and strategies to ensure that they understand and are able to predict future events and outcomes, as well as finding answers for previous occurrences and

experiences. The definition of uncertainty is provided as the presence of possible alternatives whose possibility of occurrences is equal among such alternatives. In social interactions, individuals usually focus on the need to perceive communication or information provided by the other individual. However, Berger provided that his original statements provided some propositions that uncertainty reduction theory contained dubious validity.

The theory of uncertainty reduction contains propositions that social interactions in activities such as team activities or social relationships are aimed at curbing, that is the presence of subjective uncertainty. Hence, the theory brought forth by Berger and Calabrese is an elaborate indication that uncertainty is of importance in social interaction. However, it might not be of focus in social interactions. Subjective uncertainty is augmented in that people long for a connection or need to feel wanted.

Uncertainty usually results in the presence of minor surprises, which can be equally satisfying, pleasurable and terrifying. Uncertainty is usually aversive in life because it usually results in undermining of the individual capacity of predicting the future and the fulfillment of individual needs from the social interactions. Reduction of uncertainty is based on the internalization and acceptance of norms adopted and used by the other.

This ensures that individuals in communication are aware of the other's needs and expectations from the interaction. Uncertainty in social interactions usually results in conformity with the norms and values adopted with the other. This is actualized by a party with the aim of ensuring that one gains acceptance from the other party. This is exercised with the aim of



reduction of uncertainty by an individual in the social interaction with the other party. The uncertainty reduction theory developed by Berger and Calabrese gives recognition to the presence of issues, which essentially provoke the presence of uncertainty in social interactions. However, the theory does not provide the remedies for such issues and the possible effects of uncertainty to the social interactions.

Individuals usually conform to their partner's values and beliefs with the aim of ensuring that they are able to relate and thus subsequently reduce the presence of uncertainty. Subjective uncertainty could be easily manipulated using numerous protocols. For instance in-group settings where by there is a dire need by individuals to ensure their conformity to the values and norms of a group, individuals are not granted opportunities to practice various tasks. In numerous group settings whereby individuals are divided there is the presence of less bias if individuals are granted the opportunity to practice such tasks which enhance the reduction of uncertainties in groups (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975). In-group settings individuals usually express their opinions and ideas based on the acquired values and beliefs in the group settings. Hence, this leads to disregard for individual needs, opinions and beliefs due to the need to gain acceptance and conformity with the group values and beliefs.

Hence, in-group setting, the presence of diversity in terms of norms, values, beliefs and knowledge leads to the presence of the need to reduce the uncertainties associated with the presence of unfamiliarity. Manipulation of uncertainty is possible in that individuals are able to manipulate individual uncertainty through reflections on individual problems, which they are

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unable to solve. This is usually associated with the presence of individual values and beliefs, which leads up to the dilemma identified by an individual. Hence, an individual is usually provided with a set of possible solutions to the problems and the possible drawbacks associated with each alternative solution identified. Hence, the varied responses of individuals in a group in terms of individual selection of possible solutions usually is a representation of the varied views, beliefs, opinions and values towards a specific issue. Hence, individuals usually harbor different expectations towards the outcomes of their social interactions. Uncertainty is usually referred in the context of given situation or circumstance and not based on individual values or connection. Hence, circumstances usually determine the ability of an individual to control and overcome the level of uncertainty.

Individual characteristics, values, beliefs and norms are usually reflective of the experiences an individual has thus subsequently determining the individual ability to ensure that he or she is able to reduce or eradicate uncertainty in social interactions. Individual characteristics usually determine the presence and level of uncertainty exhibited by an individual. The need to reach rapid decisions is an indication of the presence of eradication of any level of subjective uncertainty. The need for identification or the presence of structures such as friendships and family ties usually result in the adoption of new values, norms, values and beliefs with the aim of ensuring that they are able to reduce any level of uncertainty in their relationships with friends and families. Individuals are usually oriented toward the reduction of uncertainty in their social interactions and relations. Subjective uncertainty is evidenced in the various social networks availed in our modern society. In

social networks, people tend to exercise imbalances in power, which is referred to as exclusion. Interactions between two people could be interrupted by a third party.

Choice of either party in interactions with the third party usually results in the exclusion of one party. This is an indication of the presence of uncertainty, in that a party is presented with another. In-group setting individuals usually interact with each through exchange of ideas, ideals and resources with one another with the aim of changing the levels of interactions.

Exclusion of an individual in a group either consciously or unconsciously is an express means of affecting the level of uncertainty. Discrepancies in power usually affect the levels of uncertainty in interactions, in power. This is because individuals in higher levels of power are susceptible to misuse of such power held by their positions. On the hand, Familiarity usually results in reduction and eventual eradication of uncertainty in relationships.

This is enhanced by the presence of exchanges, which if frequent could substantially reduce the presence of uncertainties in relationships. This is provided in the axioms of uncertainty stated in the theory of uncertainty reduction. As provided in this theory, anxious individuals are usually unable to form relationships with strangers. This is because they dwell on the experiences as a means of making future relations. Hence, their expectations on their future and present relationships are usually based on their experiences. Exclusion is usually positively associated with uncertainty.

This is because it influences the decisions of an individual in terms of choice of alternatives for action to achieve desired results from the social interaction. Individuals who offer fewer resources are usually offered lower chances in terms of their social interactions resulting in total or minimal exclusion by other parties in a group. In addition, literature also indicates that threats, which are primed to motives usually, affect positively the level of anxiety and uncertainty respectively.

If achievement motives are primed, this usually results in the elevated levels of uncertainty and anxiety. Hence, if individual needs or goals of an individual in terms of expectations deduced from his or her social interactions are affected, this usually results in elevated levels of uncertainty and interactions. This is however not provided for in the theory of uncertainty reduction. However, a great degree of certainty and predictability in a relationship is usually unhealthy in that, it results in what could be described as a “ deaf” relationship as everything is conducted as routine.

A normal degree of uncertainty and unpredictability revitalizes a relationship because it enhances the interest to gain attention and understand the needs of the other individual. Subjective uncertainty is usually associable with the various manifestations of revelations within a group. It usually a trait, which is associated with, biases against other groups or individuals.

Personal uncertainty is usually associated to the worldviews, individual attitude, social views and opinions (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975). Uncertainty from another perspective fosters the need to gain acceptance in social

grouping or social interactions. Uncertainty is an important factor in social interactions well as the establishment of healthy social relationships. Social and worldviews usually play a significant role in guiding the individual in his or her social interactions.

This is because despite the presence of uncertainty in a group or other social interactions individuals usually disregard their individual attitudes, values, norms and beliefs and assume that the social views are appropriate for forming the social interactions. Some threats and uncertainty to the social interactions or relationships usually foster conformity than other various forms of threats. For instance, the presence of diseases usually induces conformity. Hence, in such cases society dwells on social norms and beliefs for survival despite diseases being invisible. Uncertainty is detrimental in that it induces the need by individual to reevaluate and subsequently change their characteristics. This results in the interpretation of events and issues around themselves to a specific orientation. For instance, the word grey could be interpreted by an individual with a relatively high degree of uncertainty and anxiety as having grey hair or is old. Hence, it is an indication that uncertainty is a form of esteem in that it varies from one individual to another.

This is usually based on individual experiences and future expectations of the outcomes of the social interactions. This in communication theory is defined as the assimilation theory. On the other hand, individuals usually associate themselves with a group to which they would like to be assimilated in. This is defined as the self-construal theory in that they aim at assimilation into the group irrespective of the presence of uncertainty.

Hence, they exhibit traits of assimilation if they find that the grouping aids the development of uncertainty. Independent individuals usually demonstrate assimilation traits because of their individual perceptions as self-reliant. Uncertainty is not restricted to romantic relationships and other social interactions. It is also evidenced in religious beliefs. This is evidenced by the decisions by people to make some affiliations with various religious groups. Individual relations with religious groups are at times an indication of the need to curb the various emotions of uncertainty. Religious organizations and groups usually represent a different form of social setting or grouping.

This is because the congregation of religious groups is usually bound by the presence of similarities in terms of beliefs, expectations result in the presence of homogenous behavior among the congregation of a specific faith. Hence, due to the presence of clearly defined structures in religion individuals usually attain a high level of clarity and subsequent certainty about their interactions and relations with others in the religious setting. Hence, certainty is enhanced by religion because religion is a different social structure with its definite values and beliefs. Hence, individuals with uncertainty usually seek certainty from zealous religious groups. Such uncertainty could be based on the need to gain clarity over issues such as ethical conduct, humanity and existence. Issues such as existence are easily solved by religious dogma.

Religious dogma provides information that relates to issues such as ethics, morality and existence. Religious uncertainty has effects on the receptivity of religion. Religion curbs uncertainty in various ways. Literature suggests that belief in higher supernatural power the reactivity of the cingulated

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cortex usually diminishes, an indication of the reduction of anxiety and uncertainty because individuals are less sensitive to conflicts. Rigid ideologies in the modern times offer a sense of certainty and clarity to society. This is usually the true definition of modernity as there are constant efforts to find rigid answers to the various issues which bring about uncertainty.

Because of the ease of manipulation of subjective uncertainty, this could result in the possible effects on other mental states. Such effects of manipulation could result in similar or dissimilar mechanisms, in the human cognitive abilities. The urge to reduce the level of subjective certainty has the potency to reflect and subsequently promote the sense of attainment of control. Control and the need to maintain it is a core human purpose. This is essential in that it enables an individual to reduce the levels of uncertainty by gaining the ability to influence future events or outcomes and predict the same. The ability to accrue a sense of control over issues such as social relationships is vital in that, it results in subsequent positive effects on other mental states such as confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, subjective uncertainty has the potency to reduce the capacity of an individual to attain and maintain control.

For instance, the reduction of control might result in the need by individuals especially in a group setting to identify themselves with a group or individuals with a high level of control. This is based on the self-categorization theory in that association with a group or individual with control and influence usually results in attainment of such traits. Hence, an individual accrues a high level of control and ability to influence others in

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terms of the group or relationships functionality. On the other hand, uncertainty is a good element in that it evokes a sense of clarity in terms of the individual identity and abilities rather than instilling a sense of control and ability to influence and control others.

This is in contrast with the presence of a low sense of control, which usually induces responses, which instill order, and a sense of predictability instead of provision of clarity in terms of individual identity. Causal uncertainty is emphasized by Berger and Calabrese in that individuals have a dire need to reduce their levels of uncertainty in their social interactions. Uncertainty assumes two means according to Berger and Calabrese; considerations of how an individual will react and the need to find a rationale for such behavior exhibited by an individual in the course of interaction.

Causal uncertainty hence is the inability to comprehend the reactions of others in the course of their interactions. This results in the lack of tolerance to uncertainty especially in social settings. The theory of uncertainty reduction provided by Berger fails to provide means of reduction of uncertainty.

Uncertainty could be easily reduced by an individual through the approaches such as the processing of social settings and social events. This processing of information traverses heuristics or stereotypes to gain an extensive view of the social settings and events. However, the ability to understand the social surroundings could be reduced by the high feelings of uncertainty, which necessitate the need to understand such settings. This could result in



the withdrawal from social contexts in that they find the tasks of evaluating the social settings and events tedious and emotionally consuming.

Causal is associable with the presence of aversive experiences by an individual in his or her social interactions (Berger, & Calabrese, 1975).

Uncertainty usually breeds anxiety and fear of the possibility of occurrence of bad events, Individuals at times seem to advocate for ideologies partially to reinforce their uncertain or unfounded beliefs. This means that, individuals are at times exposed to information; which challenges and disagrees with some aspects of their beliefs. Such beliefs, however, are usually crucial identity of an individual. Thus, to bolster their identities or self-concepts, individuals usually endeavor to strengthen and validate their beliefs. Hence, Advocating for such beliefs, or proselytizing, could lead to the fulfillment of individual objectives. Individuals may express opinions and beliefs, which are divergent in nature from the prevailing attitudes of their society.

This is because people are inclined to describe themselves through uncommon tendencies. For example, some define themselves in terms of their gender when encircled by individuals of another sex. Consequently, after expression of opinions, which diverge from the current attitudes of society, they are better attuned to their discrete qualities than before.

Hence, their identity is more certain than they were before resulting in dissipation of feelings of uncertainty (Baker, & Stephenson, 2000).

Individuals who usually exhibit high levels of uncertainty are inclined to make purchases of products, which could help reinforce their identities instead of products, which could enable the satisfaction of needs and wants.

Identity issues are also associated with the need by individuals to gain

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acceptance in society and their relationships. This is a form of uncertainty in that individuals need reassurances provided by the products they purchase. In addition, it is also because of influence from others in that they aim at becoming like their peers or achieving the standards set by a prejudicial society.

In conclusion, the theory provided by Berger and Calabrese is elaborate in providing the stage of communication to establish relationships in the course of social interactions. The theory only provides for the stages which are necessary in the course of interactions by strangers, it fails to provide for the challenges provided and their subsequent remedies to enable better interactions in the society. Reference Baker, S.

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