Mass Communication Theories

**Mass communication theories**

A theory is a self-conscious and systematic representation that leads to further empirical observations of communication phenomena based on scientific observation. While communication is the relative process of interpreting and creating messages that require a response. Therefore when a message does not stimulate any emotional, behavioral, or cognitive response, it does not qualify as communication. Mass communication theorists such as Stuart Hall, Marshall McLuhan, and George Gerbner developed various theoretical explanations in the 20th century, about the role of media, society, and culture. However, the media's role in society has changed over the years. Therefore, this paper will give a comprehensive analysis of the mass communication theories, including semiotics, cultural studies, cultivation, and agenda-setting theories, and justify one that has relevance in the modern reality of change and fragmentation in media.

**Semiotics**

Roland Barthes compared semiotics as an adventure and not a science, a discipline, or even a theory since he was majorly concerned with the nonverbal side of semiotics, which consists of both verbal and non-verbal interpretation of signs. Semiology is the study and analysis of anything that can stand for something else. Barthes was interested in seemingly straightforward visual signs, for example, sweating on film actors’ faces and magazine photographs of soldiers and tried to interpret their cultural meaning. He maintained that signs carry ideological implications wherever they go. A sign is a system composed of the signified for meaning and a signifier, which is the perceived image. Therefore semiotic systems work together regardless of their seeming diversity.

**Cultural studies**

Stuart Hall is critical about the scientific and quantitative research focus on media influence and mainstream communication. Hall argues that the media function exploits the powerless and the weak while maintains the dominance of the wealthy and influential individuals in society. He defines ideology as the mentality of languages, categories, concepts, presentations, and thought imagery that different social groups use to identify, figure out, or make sense in society. Hall believes that most people are unaware of their ideologies and the significant impact they can have on the community and their lives. According to Hall, the media ignores and masks their power struggle but serves the myth of democratic pluralism, where they pretend that standard norms, the rule of law, democracy, and equal opportunities, unites the society, which often is not the case. Therefore it is wrong to isolate communication studies from the culture they occupy. Instead, Hall prefers the term cultural studies to media studies to avoid this academic bias, speak out against oppression, and to unmask the power imbalances in society.

**Cultivation theory**

George Gerbner argues that excessive viewing of television result in exaggerated beliefs in a scary and mean world since television programs mostly show violent and frightening content. He believed that television is a dominant factor in modern society and draws power from the regularly viewed symbolic drama content(Griffin, 2012). Gerbner’s concerns were the impacts of television violence on the beliefs of viewers and the linked feelings, for example, the increased perception of a crime risk, which leads to more violence in society. Therefore Gerbner introduced the cultivation theory so that people could view proceedings and occurrences through a collective revealing lens.

**Agenda setting**

Agenda setting theory base on the media's ability to influence the public on issues of priority and importance through their news agenda since most people do not pay attention to a variety of topics at a given time. Therefore people focus their attention based on the cues from professional news anchors and presenters. This illustrates that the media agenda, which is the degree of essential issues in the news, influences the public concerns across an entire nation or community. Moreover, the press has powers of shaping our reality in three ways, including the ability to change thinking, essential issues, and which problems relate.

**Comparative analysis**

Several thinkers of mass communication theories have tried to explain the different uses and influences of mainstream media culture in society. Semiotics is used in modern media advertisements to create connotation films that endorse the status quo through an understanding of people's qualitative analysis and aesthetic abilities. However, some thinkers argue that not all connotative structures support the values of the dominant class. On the other hand, cultivation theory has not adapted to the modern environment of streaming and cable media since there is no convincing evidence that television viewing is the cause of violence(Mazzoleni, 2017). The agenda-setting theory has remained relatively simple and practically useful to people who care about what media says of them but does not seem to change with the modern era.

Therefore I feel that the cultural studies theory by Stuart Hall gives the best explanation of the role of mainstream media based on the current changes in the media environment. Hall believed that the role of research and theory is to empower the marginalized in society so that they can effect change in the community. This has been observed in the recent and current political, social, and economic revolutions across the world.

**References**

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