Seventh Edition

Mass Communication Theory

FOUNDATIONS, FERMENT, AND FUTURE

Stanley J. Baran
Dennis K. Davis

MASS COMMUNICATION CHRONOLOGY

1455 Johann Gutenberg invents printing press
1644 Milton's *Aeropagetica* appears
1690 *Publick Occurrences*, first newspaper in America, published
1704 First newspaper ad appears in America
1741 First magazines appear in the Colonies
1790 Bill of Rights and First Amendment adopted
1833 Benjamin Day's *New York Sun* ushers in penny press
1836 Charles Babbage develops plans for a mechanical computer in England
1844 Samuel Morse invents telegraph
1876 Alexander Graham Bell invents telephone
1877 Thomas Edison demonstrates phonograph
1894 America's first movie (kinetoscope) house opens
1895 Louis and Auguste Lumière introduce single-screen motion picture exhibit

William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer embark on yellow journalism
1896 Hearst sends infamous telegram to reporter in Cuba

Press services founded
1912 Radio Act of 1912 signed into law
1915 Pulitzer endows prize that bears his name
1920 KDKA goes on the air in Pittsburgh
1922 Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion* published

First commercial announcement broadcast on radio
1924 The American Society of Newspaper Editors' *Canons of Journalism* adopted
1926 NBC begins network broadcasting

Talking pictures introduced
1927 Radio Act of 1927 creates the Federal Radio Commission
1933 Payne Fund's *Movies, Delinquency, and Crime* published
1934 Communications Act passes, creates the Federal Communications Commission
1938 *War of the Worlds* broadcast
1939 First public broadcast of television

World War II erupts in Europe

Paperback book introduced in the United States
1940 Paul Lazarsfeld's voter studies begin in Erie County, Ohio
1941 United States enters World War II

British develop first binary computer
1942 Carl Hovland conducts first war propaganda research

British develop Colossus, the first electronic digital computer, to break German war code
1945 World War II ends

Gordon Allport and Leo Postman's rumor study published
1946 John Mauchly and John Atanasoff introduce ENIAC, the first "full-service" electronic digital computer
1947 Hutchins Commission issues report on press freedom

The Hollywood Ten called before the House Un-American Activities Committee
1948 Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics* published

Cable television invented
1949 George Orwell's *1984* published

Carl Hovland, Arthur Lumsdaine, and Fred Sheffield's *Experiments in Mass Communication* published
1951 Harold Innis's *The Bias of Communication* published

Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now* premieres
UNIVAC becomes the first successful commercial computer
1953 Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley's *Communication and Persuasion* published
1954 Murrow challenges McCarthy on television
1955 Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz's *Personal Influence* published
1957 C. Wright Mills's *Power Elite* published

Soviet Union launches Sputnik, Earth's first human-constructed satellite

Leon Festinger's *Cognitive Dissonance* published
1958 Television quiz show scandal erupts

1959 C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination* published
1960 John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon meet in the Great Debates
Television in 90 percent of all U.S. homes
Joseph Klapper's *Effects of Mass Communication* published
1961 Key's *Public Opinion and American Democracy* published
Kennedy makes nation's first live TV presidential press conference
Schramm team's *Television in the Lives of Our Children* published
1962 Festinger's cognitive dissonance article appears
Sidney Kraus's *Great Debates* published
Air Force commissions Paul Baran to develop a national computer network
1963 JFK assassinated
Albert Bandura's aggressive modeling experiments first appear
Networks begin one-half-hour newscasts
1964 McLuhan's *Understanding Media* published
1965 Color comes to all three commercial TV networks
Comsat satellite launched
1966 Mendelsohn's *Mass Entertainment* published
Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* published
1967 Merton's *On Theoretical Sociology* published
1969 Blumer coins "symbolic interaction"
ARPANET, forerunner to Internet, goes online
1971 Bandura's *Psychological Modeling* published
1972 *Surgeon General's Report on Television and Social Behavior* released
McCombs and Shaw introduce "agenda-setting"
Gerbner's Violence Profile initiated
FCC requires cable companies to provide "local access"
Ray Tomlinson develops e-mail
1973 Watergate Hearings broadcast live
1974 Blumler and Katz's *The Uses of Mass Communication* published
Noelle-Neumann introduces "spiral of silence"
Goffman pioneers frame analysis
Home use of VCR introduced
Term "Internet" coined
1975 ASNE's *Statement of Principles* replaces *Canons*
Bill Gates and Paul Allen develop operating system for personal computers
1977 Steve Jobs and Stephen Wozniak perfect Apple II
Janus's Critical Feminist Theory article published
1978 Digital audio and video recording adopted as media industry standard
Faules and Alexander's *Communication and Social Behavior: A Symbolic Interaction Perspective published*
1981 IBM introduces the PC
Petty and Cacioppo's Elaboration Likelihood Model introduced
1983 *Journal of Communication* devotes entire issue to "Ferment in the Field"
CD introduced
1984 Radway's *Reading the Romance* published
Graber's *Processing the News published*
1985 Meyrowitz's *No Sense of Place* published
Ang's *Watching Dallas* published
Vallone et al.'s Hostile Media Effect introduced
1990 Signorielli and Morgan's *Cultivation Analysis* published
1991 Gulf War explodes, CNN emerges as important news source
1992 ACT disbands, says work is complete
1992 World Wide Web released
1993 Ten years after "Ferment," *Journal of Communication* tries again with special issue, "The Future of the Field"
Patterson's *Out of Order published*
1995 Anderson's General Aggression Model introduced
Launch of *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*
1996 Telecommunications Act passes, relaxes broadcast ownership rules, deregulates cable television, mandates television content ratings
1998 *Journal of Communication* devotes entire issue to media literacy
MP3 introduced
1999 Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published
2000 Name change of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* to *Critical Studies in Media Communication*
Green and Brock's narrative persuasion and transportation theories

2001 Terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C.

2002 Slater and Rouner's Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model introduced

2003 FCC institutes new, relaxed media ownership rules

U.S. invasion of Iraq

Social networking websites appear

Bloggers' Code of Ethics formalized

2004 *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* focuses edition on media framing

American Behavioral Scientist devotes two entire issues to media literacy

Facebook launched

Sherry's call for a Neuroscience Perspective

2005 YouTube launched

News Corp (Rupert Murdoch) buys MySpace

2006 Google buys YouTube

Twitter launched

2007 *Journal of Communication* publishes special issue on framing, agenda-setting, and priming

2008 *Journal of Communication* publishes special issue on the "intersection" of different mass communication research methods and theoretical approaches

Moyer-Gusé's entertainment overcoming resistance model introduced

2009 Internet overtakes newspapers as a source of news for Americans

American Society of Newspaper Editors becomes American Society of News Editors

Radio and Television News Directors Association becomes Radio Television

Digital News Association

Social networking use exceeds e-mail

2011 Sales of e-books exceed sales of print books on Amazon

Digital music sales surpass sales of physical discs

Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street

2012 U.S. sales of tablets exceed those of laptop computers

Online movie transactions exceed number of physical disc transactions

U.S. Internet ad spending exceeds all U.S. print advertising

Audit Bureau of Circulations becomes Alliance for Audited Media

Association of Alternative Newsweeklies becomes the Association of Alternative Newsmedia

2013 American Psychiatric Association adds "Internet Addiction Disorder" to *American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*

From the Cengage Series in Mass Communication and Journalism

General Mass Communication

Belmas/Overbeck, *Major Principles of Media Law*, 2014 Edition
Biagi, *Media/Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media*, Eleventh Edition
Fellow, *American Media History*, Third Edition
Hilmes, *Connections: A Broadcast History Reader*
Hilmes, *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, Fourth Edition
Lester, *Visual Communication: Images with Messages*, Sixth Edition
Straubhaar/LaRose/Davenport, *Media Now: Understanding Media, Culture, and Technology*, Eighth Edition
Zelezny, *Cases in Communications Law*, Sixth Edition
Zelezny, *Communications Law: Liberties, Restraints, and the Modern Media*, Sixth Edition

Journalism

Bowles/Borden, *Creative Editing*, Sixth Edition
Davis/Davis, *Think Like an Editor: 50 Strategies for the Print and Digital World*, Second Edition
Hilliard, *Writing for Television, Radio, and New Media*, Eleventh Edition
Kessler/McDonald, *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style*, Eighth Edition
Kessler/McDonald, *Cengage Advantage Books: When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style + Exercise Book*, Eighth Edition
Rich, *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method*, Seventh Edition

Public Relations and Advertising

Diggs-Brown, *Strategic Public Relations: Audience Focused Approach*
Diggs-Brown, *The PR Styleguide: Formats for Public Relations Practice*, Third Edition
Drewniany/Jewler, *Creative Strategy in Advertising*, Eleventh Edition
Hendrix, *Public Relations Cases*, Ninth Edition
Newsom/Haynes, *Public Relations Writing: Form and Style*, Tenth Edition
Newsom/Turk/Kruckeberg, *Cengage Advantage Books: This is PR: The Realities of Public Relations*, Eleventh Edition
Sivulka, *Soap, Sex, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising*, Second Edition

Research and Theory

Baran/Davis, *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future*, Seventh Edition
Sparks, *Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview*, Fourth Edition
Wimmer/Dominick, *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*, Tenth Edition

MASS COMMUNICATION THEORY

Foundations, Ferment, and Future

SEVENTH EDITION

Stanley J. Baran, Ph.D.
Bryant University

Dennis K. Davis, Ph.D.
Pennsylvania State University

CENGAGE Learning®

Australia • Brazil • Mexico • Singapore • United Kingdom • United States

CENGAGE Learning®

Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, Ferment, and Future, Seventh Edition
Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis

Product Director: Monica Eckman

Product Manager: Kelli Strieby

Associate Content Developer: Erin Bosco

Product Assistant: Katie Walsh

Media Developer: Jessica Badiner

Marketing Manager: Jillian Borden

Art and Cover Direction, Production Management, and Composition: PreMediaGlobal

Manufacturing Planner: Doug Bertke

Rights Acquisitions Specialist: Amber Hosea

Cover Image: © mareandmare/iStockphoto

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013949097

Student Edition:

ISBN-13: 978-1-285-05207-6

ISBN-10: 1-285-05207-2

Cengage Learning
200 First Stamford Place, 4th Floor
Stamford, CT 06902
USA

Cengage Learning is a leading provider of customized learning solutions with office locations around the globe, including Singapore, the United Kingdom, Australia, Mexico, Brazil and Japan. Locate your local office at **www.cengage.com/global**.

Cengage Learning products are represented in Canada by Nelson Education, Ltd.

To learn more about Cengage Learning Solutions, visit **www.cengage.com**.

Purchase any of our products at your local college store or at our preferred online store **www.cengagebrain.com**.

Printed in the United States of America
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 17 16 15 14 13

To Sidney Kraus

His words and actions—indeed, how he has chosen to live his life and career—in the years since the first edition of this book have convinced us of the wisdom of our original decision to honor him—our friend, mentor, and colleague.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

We have been collaborating on media theory textbooks for over 30 years beginning with a book published in 1981 and continuing with seven editions of this textbook. During that time we have witnessed many changes in society, politics, the media, media theory, and the media research community. There have been times of prosperity and there have been economic crises. Euphoria greeted the end of the Cold War followed by the terror of 9/11. Dot-com companies boomed and crashed. The Internet was first a novelty and then a significant but hard-to-classify medium. Social media and smartphones appeared and added new complexity to an already chaotic media landscape.

We have witnessed many changes to media theory and research—from the ferment of debate over theory in the 1980s to the emergence of more nuanced perspectives on theory in recent years. We watched as researchers increasingly struggled with questions flowing from accelerating changes in media. They debated how best to understand the role of new media and to chart their place among the well-established mass media. Considerable research focused on mass media entertainment and its effects. Researchers asked whether new media-based entertainment would displace established mass media. Would the Internet replace television or would the tube absorb the Net? Did the protection of children from online smut require new laws? The rise of social media raised a new set of questions. Would interaction with mediated friends displace real-world interactions? Would content recommended by friends prove more persuasive?

The events of September 11, 2001, and the wars that followed had a sobering influence on the development of media theory. Suddenly, research on mass entertainment seemed less important and interest in political communication research surged. Many if not all of the reasons that sent us to combat, unexamined and unchallenged by much of the media we count on to help us govern ourselves, proved to be false. Where were the media when it counted, or in the words of Michael Massing in the *New York Review of Books*, "Now they tell us." But consider

that five years after the start of what was supposed to be a "cake walk" and three years after President Bush himself told the public that there was no link between Iraq and September 11, "as many as four in 10 Americans [41 percent] continued to believe that Saddam Hussein's regime was directly involved in financing, planning, or carrying out the terrorist attacks on that horrible day" (Braiker, 2007). Growing awareness of the media industries' powers and responsibilities led to significant criticism of their performance in the run-up to war and its coverage, and more surprising, an unprecedented public outcry against media concentration. The American people, writes media critic Todd Gitlin, "rub their eyes and marvel that a nation possessed of such an enormous industry ostensibly specializing in the gathering and distribution of facts could yet remain so befogged" (2004, p. 58).

In our preface to the sixth edition we confessed to being challenged by the way that media theory was evolving in response to technological change and to globalization. When it comes to media theories, what is still relevant and what is unimportant? How can and should we understand the role media now play in the world that has been so radically altered? Those challenges have continued and have become even more serious. Trust in media continues to erode. Questions about the way media affect our system of self-governance and our ability to know ourselves, our neighbors, and our world have become even more difficult to address. Does social media bring us closer to politicians or is it simply another tool that elites can use to manipulate us?

Although this textbook features much less historical background than previous editions, it continues to place the discipline's advances (and missteps) in historical context. The value of this strategy resides in its ability to reveal how social theory generally—and media theory specifically—develops as an ongoing effort to address pressing technological, social, and political problems. Often the most important eras for media theory development have been those of crisis and social turmoil. These are the times when the most important questions about media are asked and the search for their answers is most desperate. For half a century after the 1940s, we relied on media theories forged in the cauldron of economic depression and worldwide warfare. But by the 1990s and the end of the Cold War, the concerns of earlier eras had faded. In earlier editions, we asked whether an era of dramatic technological change might give rise to new media theories for a world whose problems were different from those of the 1940s. Did we need new media theories to fit a stable and orderly world with rising economic prosperity and startling but beneficent technological change? This question took on new significance with the dot-com crash in 2000, the economic crisis of 2008, and the recent rise of social media. Thus far, there are no new theories but the evolution of several existing theories has accelerated.

After 9/11 we were confronted by the challenges of a world in which many old questions about the role of media suddenly had new urgency. Attention turned again to the persuasive power of media and the degree to which elites control our knowledge and understanding of the social world. As you read this edition, you will find that we devote considerable attention to theories of media cognition and framing. These theories provide tools for gaining insight into the subtle ways that media can be used to control and direct political and social change. Many of the most important media research questions raised by 9/11 have only begun to be addressed. But it is clear that media theory can provide crucial insights as we work to come to grips with a new kind of public discourse, a new kind of America, a new kind of world.

A UNIQUE APPROACH

One unique feature of this book is the balanced, comprehensive introduction to the two major bodies of theory currently dominating the field: the social/behavioral theories and the cultural/critical theories. We need to know the strengths and the limitations of these two bodies of theory. We need to know how they developed in the past, how they are developing in the present, and what new conceptions they might produce, because not only do these schools of thought represent the mass communication theory of today, but they also promise to dominate our understanding of mass communication for some time to come. This balanced approach is becoming even more useful as more and more prominent scholars are calling for the integration of these bodies of theory (Delli Carpini, 2013; Jensen and Neuman, 2013; Potter, 2009).

Many American texts emphasize social/behavioral theories and either ignore or denigrate cultural/critical theories; European texts do the opposite. Conversely, as critical/cultural theories have begun to gain popularity in the United States, there have been a few textbooks that explain these theories, yet they tend to ignore or disdain social/behavioral theories. Instructors and students who want to cover *all* types of media theories are forced to use two or more textbooks and then need to sort out the various criticisms of competing ideas these books offer. To solve this problem (and we hope advance understanding of all mass communication theory), we systematically explain the legitimate differences between these theories and the research based on them. We also consider possibilities for accommodation or collaboration. This edition considers these possibilities in greater depth and detail. It is becoming increasingly clear how these bodies of theory can complement each other and provide a much broader and more useful basis for thinking about and conducting research on media.

THE USE OF HISTORY

In this book, we assume that it is important for those who study mass communication theory to have a strong grounding in its historical development. Therefore, in the pages that follow, we trace the history of theory in a clear, straightforward manner. We include discussions of historical events and people we hope students will find inherently interesting, especially if instructors use widely available DVDs, video downloads, and other materials to illustrate them (such as political propaganda, the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, newsreels from the World War II era, and the early days of television, and so on).

Readers familiar with previous editions of this textbook will find that we've made some significant changes in the way that we present the unfolding of media theory. For example, one theme of this book ever since its first edition is that theory is inevitably a product of its time. You will see that this edition is replete with examples of media's performance during our ongoing "war on terror" and their own ongoing institutional upheaval, but you will also see that many individual conceptions of mass communication theory themselves have been reinvigorated, challenged, reconsidered, or otherwise altered.

We have made an important change in how we discuss the emergence of the two important bodies of media theory. We no longer refer to specific eras in theory development and we don't use the term "paradigm" to refer to them. Instead we talk about the

development of trends in media theory. We think that the notion of "trends in theory" better represents the way that the field has evolved. We have identified three trends in theory development. The first trend—the mass society and propaganda theory trend—was dominant from the 1920s until the 1940s. It gradually gave way to the media-effects-theory trend—a trend that dominated media research from the 1950s until the 1980s when it began to be challenged by the critical cultural theory trend.

NEW TO THIS EDITION

Although we have substantially reduced our discussion of older theories, our condensed consideration of the history of the discipline is still much more extensive and detailed than other theory textbooks. This made room for a wide variety of new thinking in mass communication theory. Some of the ideas you'll encounter that are new to this edition are:

- the Dual Model of Social Responsibility Theory
- an expansion of Daniel Hallin's Sphere of Consensus, Legitimate Debate, and Deviance in the digital age
- Anderson and Dill's General Aggressive Model of media violence
- Super-Peer Theory of learning from media
- a discussion of the impact of sexual hip-hop
- the Downward Spiral Model of Media Effects and the desensitization to violence
- an expanded discussion of critical feminist scholarship and feminist reception studies
- Objectification Theory (drawn from feminist critical theory)
- the Empowered Child Model of Media Research/Development
- wishful and similarity identification in media effects
- an expanded discussion of Entertainment Theory and Mood Management Theory
- a detailed discussion of Schema Theory and information processing
- the Heuristic-Systematic Model of information processing
- Transportation Theory
- Narrative Persuasion Theory
- the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model
- the Entertainment Overcoming Resistance Model
- the Delay Hypothesis of media effects
- Hostile Media Theory
- an examination of the literature on the neuroscience perspective of information processing
- Affective Intelligence
- Motivated Reasoning and the Backfire Effect
- the Top-Down/Bottom-Up Theory of Political Attitude Formation
- Entman's cascading activation model of framing
- a discussion of transactive memory and neural plasticity and Internet use
- the Dual-Factor Model of Facebook Use
- the Idealized Virtual Identity Hypothesis of social network use
- the Extended Real-life Hypothesis of social network use
- Parental Mediation Theory of children's digital media use, and
- new sections on health communication and computer-mediated communication.

THE USE OF TOPICS FOR CRITICAL THINKING

It is important, too, that students realize that researchers develop theories to address important questions about the role of media—enduring questions that will again become important as new media continue to be introduced and as we deal with a world reordered by September 11, the ongoing war on terrorism, systemic economic distress, and seemingly intractable political and cultural divides. We must be aware of how the radical changes in media that took place in the past are related to the changes taking place now.

We attempt this engagement with mass communication theory in several ways. Every chapter begins with a list of Learning Objectives designed to guide student thinking. Each chapter also includes a section entitled *Critical Thinking Questions*. Its aim, as the title suggests, is to encourage students to think critically, even skeptically, about how that chapter's theories have been applied in the past or how they are being applied today. Each chapter also includes at least two *Thinking about Theory* boxes. These pedagogical devices are also designed to encourage critical thinking. Some discuss how a theorist addressed an issue and tried to resolve it. Still others highlight and criticize important, issue-related examples of the application of media theory. Students are asked to relate material in these boxes to contemporary controversies, events, and theories. A few examples are Chapter 4's essay on drug arrests and race, Chapter 8's box on media coverage of workers and the working poor, and Chapter 9's essay on American climate change denialism. We hope that readers will find these useful in developing their own thinking about these issues. We believe that mass communication theory, if it is to have any meaning for students, must be used by them.

We have also sprinkled the chapters with *Instant Access* boxes, presenting the advantages and disadvantages of the major theories we discuss. The advantages are those offered by the theories' proponents; the disadvantages represent the views of their critics. These presentations are at best sketchy or partial, and although they should give a pretty good idea of the theories, the picture needs to be completed with a full reading of the chapters and a great deal of reflection on the theories they present. All chapters also provide marginal definitions of important terms, and chapter summaries. Finally, at the end of the text there is an extensive bibliography and a thorough index.

THE BIG PICTURE

This textbook provides a comprehensive, authoritative introduction to mass communication theory. We have provided clearly written examples, graphics, and other materials to illustrate key theories. We trace the emergence of three trends in media theory—mass society/propaganda, social/behavioral, and critical/cultural. Then we discuss how each of these bodies of theory contributes to our understanding of media and human development, the use of media by audiences, the influence of media on cognition, the role of media in society, and finally the links between media and culture. The book ends with a consideration of how media theory is developing to meet current challenges, especially those posed by the new interactive digital technologies. We offer many examples of social/behavioral and critical/cultural theory

and an in-depth discussion of their strengths and limitations. We emphasize that media theories are human creations typically intended to address specific problems or issues. We believe that it is easier to learn theories when they are examined with contextual information about the motives of theorists and the problems and issues they addressed.

In the next few years, as mass media industries continue to experience rapid change and our use of media evolves, understanding of media theory will become even more necessary and universal. We've continued to argue in this edition that many of the old questions about the role of media in culture, in society, and in people's lives have resurfaced with renewed relevance. This book traces how researchers and theorists have traditionally addressed these questions and we provide insights into how they might do so in the future.

THE SUPPORTING PHILOSOPHY OF THIS BOOK

The philosophy of this book is relatively straightforward: Though today's media technologies might be new, their impact on daily life might not be so different from that of past influences. Changes in media have always posed challenges but have also created opportunities. We can use media to improve the quality of our lives, or we can permit our lives to be seriously disrupted. As a society, we can use media wisely or foolishly. To make these choices, we need theories—those explaining the role of media for us as individuals and guiding the development of media industries for our society at large. This book should help us develop our understanding of theory so we can make better use of media and play a bigger role in the development of new media industries.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For Instructors: An **Online Instructor's Manual** is available to assist faculty teaching a mass communication theory or media and society course. The Instructor's Manual offers assignment ideas, suggestions for audiovisual materials and for using many of the text's special features, syllabus preparation tools, and a sample syllabus. A Test Bank features chapter-by-chapter test questions in both multiple-choice and discussion/essay formats. You can download the Instructor's Manual by accessing the text's password-protected Instructor Companion Site.

For Students: A **Student Companion Site** provides access to a rich array of study tools, including chapter-level tutorial quizzes, Critical Thinking exercises, a glossary, flashcards, and relevant Web links.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing this seventh edition, we have had the assistance of many people. Most important, we have drawn on the scholarly work of several generations of social and cultural theorists. Their ideas have inspired and guided contemporary work. It's an exciting time to be a communication scholar!

We work within a research community that, although in ferment, is also both vibrant and supportive. In these pages, we acknowledge and explain the contributions

that our many colleagues across the United States and around the world have made to mass communication theory. We regret the inevitable errors and omissions, and we take responsibility for them. We are also grateful to our reviewers.

These reviewers helped us avoid some errors and omissions, but they bear no responsibility for those that remain. We also wish to thank our Cengage friends, whose encouragement and advice sustained us. Their task was made less difficult than it might otherwise have been by our first Wadsworth editor, Becky Hayden, and Chris Clerkin, the editor for the first edition of this text. These accomplished professionals taught us how to avoid many of the sins usually committed by novice authors. The editor who worked with us the longest, Holly Allen, is as sharp as her predecessors, and she became quite adept at using her gentle hand with what had become two veteran textbook authors. Our new editorial team, ably headed by Erin Bosco, continued the competence and professionalism to which we have become accustomed.

We must also thank our families. The Davis children—Jennifer, Kerry, Andy, Mike—are now scattered across the Midwest in Norman, Lincoln, Nashville, and Chicago, so they have been less involved with (or impacted by) the day-to-day development of this edition. Nonetheless, they often assisted with insights drawn from the academic fields in which they themselves have become expert: history, philosophy, Asian studies, marketing, and computer science. The Baran kids—Jordan and Matt Dowd—are scattered as well, but Internet and phone access when the authors had questions about those "new-fangled" technologies proved invaluable. They suffered our questions with charm and love.

It would be impossible to overstate the value of our wives' support. Nancy Davis continues to provide a sympathetic audience for efforts to think through media theory and brainstorm ways to apply it. Susan Baran, an expert in media literacy in her own right, has a remarkable ability to find the practical in the most theoretical. This is why more than a few of the ideas and examples in these pages found their refinement in her sharp mind. She keeps her husband grounded as a thinker and author while she lifts him as a man and father.

Finally, this book is the product of a collaboration that has gone on for over 40 years. We started our professional careers at Cleveland State University in 1973 in a communication department headed by Sidney Kraus. Sid inspired us, along with most other junior faculty, to become active, productive researchers. Today, a disproportionate number of active communication scholars have direct or indirect links to the Cleveland State program. Sid demonstrates the many ways that a single person can have a powerful impact on a discipline. Through his scholarship, his mentorship, and his friendship he has left a truly indelible mark.

S.J.B. & D.K.D.

Foundations: Introduction to Mass Communication Theory and Its Roots

SECTION 1

Understanding and Evaluating Mass Communication Theory

CHAPTER 1

Social networking site Facebook debuted on the Internet in 2003. Within five years it grew to 100 million users, and in October 2012, the company proudly announced it had 1 billion members visiting monthly, networking in over 70 languages (Delo, 2012). Upon reaching that milestone, Facebook released a video likening its brand to bridges, airplanes, and the universe. Critics easily saw the connection to bridges and planes. Like social networking, they bring people together. But the universe? A billion folks is a lot, but it's hardly the universe. Maybe the point was that Facebook's "citizens" represent a universe unto themselves. But it must be a strange universe indeed, with all those kids posting what they had for lunch, gossiping, and posting party pictures … if in fact that was who populated the world of Facebook. It's not. Forty-six percent of Facebookers are over 45 years old, and this, its fastest-growing age segment, is larger than the 0- to 34-year-olds (42 percent) everyone assumes are its heaviest users (Skelton, 2012).

So maybe the typical Facebooker isn't what we usually think of when we consider who uses the site. So, what else do we want to know about these 1 billion users? How many friends does a typical Facebooker have? About 130 (Skelton, 2012). But now this raises another question. What exactly is a *friend*? If you can have 130 of them, are they really friends? Of course they are, argue psychologists Ashwini Nadkarni and Stefan Hofmann, who argue that Facebook fosters a sense of belonging and lets people express themselves as they'd like, two obvious functions served by real friends (2012). But in a billion-person universe there have to be a lot of different kinds of people looking for different things from their online friendships. Of course there are. Psychologists Laura Buffardi and Keith Campbell (2008) claim that narcissists and people with low self-esteem spend more time on Facebook than do others. But according to another psychologist, Samuel D. Gosling and his

research team, maybe personality differences have little to do with *why* people use Facebook, as they discovered that rather than using the site to compensate for aspects of their offline personalities, users simply carry those everyday characteristics over to their online selves (Gosling et al., 2011).

Clearly Facebook is a useful medium to lots of people. Many log onto the site several times every day and constantly post updates. Most users don't give much thought to what they are doing and why. If asked, most say they are simply passing time, being entertained or engaging in casual communication with friends and family. But could Facebook be more important than they realize? What about your own use of Facebook? Is it making an important difference in your life or is it just another way to pass time? How do you view the company that provides you with Facebook? Do you know how it earns a profit from the services it provides? If you regularly upload lots of personal information, you are trusting that the company will not misuse this information and will provide you with the level of privacy that you want. But should you be so trusting? Facebook is a private company and it aggressively seeks to earn profits by selling information and giving advertisers access to its users. Should you care more about what Facebook does with the information you provide?

Your answers to these questions are naturally based on *your* ideas or assumptions about Facebook, its users, and your own experiences. You can take into account what your friends say about Facebook and what you happen to read in the media. You might wonder if what you think is happening for you and your friends is the same for all those "old people" Facebook says are there. Psychologists Nadkarni, Hofmann, Buffardi, Campbell, and Gosling had their ideas and assumptions, too but they moved beyond their immediate personal experience to conduct research. They collected data and systematically assessed the usefulness of their ideas. They engaged in social science. Working together with others in a research community they are seeking to develop a formal, systematic set of ideas about Facebook and its role in the social world. They are helping to develop a mass communication theory.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter you should be able to

- Explain differences in the operation of the physical and social sciences.
- Describe the relationship between the scientific method and causality.
- Define theory.
- Differentiate the four broad categories of mass communication theory—postpositive, cultural, critical, and normative theory—by their ontology, epistemology, and axiology.
- Establish criteria for judging theory.
- Differentiate the four trends in media theory—the mass society and mass culture, limited-effects, critical cultural, and meaning-making trends.

OVERVIEW

In this chapter, we will discuss just what separates an idea, a belief, or an assumption from a theory. We will examine mass communication theories and media theories created by social scientists and humanists. We'll look at some of the difficulties faced by those who attempt to systematically study and understand human behavior. We'll consider the particular problems encountered when the concern involves human behavior *and* the media. We'll see, too, that the definition of *social science* can be quite elusive. We'll define *theory* and offer several classifications of communication theory, media theory, and mass communication theory. We'll trace the way that theories of mass communication have been created and we will examine the purposes served by these theories. Most important, we will try to convince you that the difficulties that seem to surround the development and study of mass communication theory aren't really difficulties at all; rather, they are challenges that make the study of mass communication theory interesting and exciting. As physicist John D. Barrow wrote, "A world that [is] simple enough to be fully known would be too simple to contain conscious observers who might know it" (1998, p. 3).

DEFINING AND REDEFINING MASS COMMUNICATION

In recent decades, the number and variety of mass communication and media theories have steadily increased. Media theory has emerged as a more or less independent body of thought in both the social sciences and the humanities. This book is intended as a guide to this diverse and sometimes contradictory thinking. You will find ideas developed by scholars in every area of the social sciences, from history and anthropology to sociology and psychology. Ideas have also been drawn from the humanities, especially from philosophy and literary analysis. The resulting ferment of ideas is both challenging and heuristic. These theories provide the raw materials for constructing even more useful and powerful theoretical perspectives.

If you are looking for a concise, definitive definition of theory, you won't find it in this book. We have avoided narrow definitions of theory in favor of an inclusive approach that finds value in most systematic, scholarly efforts to make sense of media and their role in society. We have included recent theories that some contemporary researchers consider unscientific. Some of the theories we review are **grand**; they try to explain entire media systems and their role in society. Others are narrowly focused and provide insight into specific uses or effects of media. Our selection of theories for inclusion in this book is based partly on their enduring historical importance and partly on their potential to contribute to future scholarship. This process is necessarily subjective and is based on our own understanding of media and mass communication. Our consideration of contemporary perspectives is focused on those that illustrate enduring or innovative conceptualizations. But before we embark on that consideration, we need to offer definitions of some important concepts.

grand theory
Theory designed to describe and explain all aspects of a given phenomenon

mass communication
When a source, typically an organization, employs a technology as a medium to communicate with a large audience

When an organization employs a technology as a medium to communicate with a large audience, **mass communication** is said to have occurred. The professionals at the *New York Times* (an organization) use printing presses and the newspaper (technology and medium) to reach their readers (a large audience). The

writers, producers, filmmakers, and other professionals at the Cartoon Network use various audio and video technologies, satellites, cable television, and home receivers to communicate with their audience. Warner Brothers places ads in magazines to tell readers what movies it is releasing and it distributes those movies to local theaters where they are viewed by audiences.

But as you no doubt know—and as you'll be reminded constantly throughout this text—the mass communication environment is changing quite radically. When you receive a piece of direct-mail advertising addressed to you by name, and in which your name is used throughout, you are an audience of one—not the large audience envisioned in traditional notions of mass communication. When you sit at your computer and post a comment to a news story that is read by thousands of other readers, you are obviously communicating with a large audience, but you are not an organization in the sense of a newspaper, cable television network, or movie studio. The availability of lightweight, portable, inexpensive video equipment—quite possibly your smartphone—combined with the development of easy-to-use Internet video sites like YouTube, makes it possible for an "everyday" person like you to be a television writer and producer, reaching audiences numbering in the tens of millions.

Although most theories we will study in this text were developed before our modern communications revolution, many are still quite useful. But we must remember that much has changed and is changing in how people use technologies to communicate. One useful way to do this is to think of **mediated communication** as existing on a continuum that stretches from **interpersonal communication** at one end to traditional forms of mass communication at the other. Where different media fall along this continuum depends on the amount of control and involvement people have in the communication process. The telephone, for example (the phone as traditionally understood—not the one you might own that has Internet access, GPS, and some 500 other "killer apps"), sits at one end. It is obviously a communication technology, but one that is most typical of interpersonal communication: At most, a very few people can be involved in communicating at any given time, and they have a great deal of involvement with and control over that communication. The conversation is theirs, and they determine its content. A big-budget Hollywood movie or a network telecast of the Super Bowl sits at the opposite pole. Viewers have limited control over the communication that occurs. Certainly, people can apply idiosyncratic interpretations to the content before them, and they can choose to direct however much attention they wish to the screen. They can choose to actively seek meaning from media content, or they can choose to passively decode it. But their control and involvement cannot directly alter the content of the messages being transmitted. Message content is centrally controlled by media organizations.

mediated communication Communication between a few or many people that employ a technology as a medium

interpersonal communication Communication between two or a few people, typically face-to-face

As you'll see when we examine the more contemporary mass communication theories, new communication technologies are rapidly filling in the middle of the continuum between the telephone and television. Suddenly, media consumers have the power to alter message content if they are willing to invest the time and have the necessary skill and resources. Audiences are choosing to be *active* in ways that are hard to anticipate, and the consequences of their activity may not be understood for decades to come. The rise of social networking and YouTube

demonstrates an ever-growing willingness to use media to share content and perspectives on content. The ongoing popularity of downloading music and the Apple iPod show a willingness to invest the time, acquire the skills, and purchase the technology necessary to take greater control over music. These forms of audience activity have enabled media companies like Apple, Google, and Facebook to become dominant forces in a media world previously dominated by the likes of Disney, News Corporation, and Time Warner. New media companies are competing to provide innovative and useful technologies that deliver more attractive services. These technologies and services will give us new ways to create and control media content that is important to us. As this happens, there will be profound consequences for our personal lives, the media industries, and the larger social world. As journalist and new media theorist Jeff Jarvis explains, "Back in the day, a decade … ago, we discovered media—news, information, or service—through brands: We went and bought the newspaper or magazine or turned on a channel on its schedule. That behavior and expectation was brought to the Internet: Brands built sites and expected us to come to them. Now there are other spheres of discovery—new spheres that are shifting in importance, effectiveness, and share. I believe they will overlap more and more to provide better—that is, more relevant, timely, and authoritative—means of discovery. These evolving spheres also change the relationships of creators and customers and the fundamental economics of media" (2010).

SCIENCE AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Ours is a society that generally respects and believes its scientists. Science is one of the fundamental reasons why we enjoy our admirable standard of living and have a growing understanding of the world around us. But not all scientists or the science that they practice are understood or revered equally. British astronomer and philosopher John D. Barrow opened his 1998 book, *Impossibility: The Limits of Science and the Science of Limits*, with this observation on the value of science and its practitioners:

> Bookshelves are stuffed with volumes that expound the successes of the mind and the silicon chip. We expect science to tell us what can be done and what is to be done. Governments look to scientists to improve the quality of life and safeguard us from earlier "improvements." Futurologists see no limit to human inquiry, while social scientists see no end to the raft of problems it spawns. (p. 1)

The physical *scientists* and engineers are the dreamers, the fixers, the guardians. They are the future—they have sent us photos of stars aborning, detailed the inner workings of the atom, and invented the microwave oven, the World Wide Web, and cell phones that take and send video. *Social scientists* are the naysayers, the Grinches of the world. They tell us that television corrupts our morals, political campaigns render us too cynical to participate meaningfully in our democracy, and parents rely too heavily on television to babysit their kids. Or, as columnist David Brooks reminds us, "A survey of the social science of the past century shows it to be, by and large, an insanely pessimistic field" (2002, p. 22). We tend to readily accept most of the good findings of Barrow's *scientists*. The universe is continually expanding? Of course. The existence of quarks? Naturally. At the same time, we tend to be more suspicious of the findings of the *social scientists*.

Playing with Barbies destroys little girls' self-esteem? I don't think so! Videogames teach violence? That's so Twentieth Century! Texting kills spelling and grammar? OMG! U r wrng. LOL!

There is another important difference that we often see between physical and social science. Physical science has allowed us to gain increasing control over the physical world. This control has had direct and very useful consequences for our daily lives. Powerful technologies have been invented that very effectively shelter us from our environment and enable us to do things that would have been seen as magical just a few decades ago. But what has social science done for us lately? Is the social world a better place as a result of social science? Do we understand ourselves and others better? Are there stunning achievements that compare to splitting the atom or landing on the moon? Compared to the physical science, the social sciences seem much less useful and their theories less practical and more controversial.

social scientists
Scientists who examine relationships among phenomena in the human or social world

Why does our society seem to have greater difficulty accepting the theories and findings of **social scientists**, those who apply logic and observation—that is, science—to the understanding of the social world, rather than the physical world? Why do we have trust in the people who wield telescopes and microscopes to probe the breadth of the universe and the depth of human cells but skepticism about the tools used by social observers to probe the breadth of the social world or the depth of human experience? You can read more about the levels of respect afforded to scientists of different stripes in the box entitled "All Scientific Inquiry Is Value-Laden."

causality
When a given factor influences another, even by way of an intervening variable

causal relationship
When the alterations in a particular variable under specific conditions always produce the same effect in another variable

One important basis for our society's reluctance to accept the theories of the social scientists is the *logic of* **causality**. We readily understand this logic. You've no doubt had it explained to you during a high school physics or chemistry class, so we'll use a simple example from those classes: boiling water. If we (or our representatives, the scientists) can manipulate an independent variable (heat) and produce the same effect (boiling at 100 degrees centigrade) under the same conditions (sea level) every time, then a **causal relationship** has been established. Heating water at sea level to 100 degrees will cause water to boil. No matter how many times you heat beakers of water at sea level, they will all boil at 100 degrees. Lower the heat; the water does not boil. Heat it at the top of Mount Everest; it boils at lower temperatures. Go back to sea level (or alter the atmospheric pressure in a laboratory test); it boils at 100 degrees. This is repeated observation under controlled conditions. We even have a name for this, the **scientific method**, and there are many definitions for it. Here is a small sample:

scientific method
A search for truth through accurate observation and interpretation of fact

hypothesis
A testable prediction about some event

1. "A means whereby insight into an undiscovered truth is sought by (1) identifying the problem that defines the goal of the quest, (2) gathering data with the hope of resolving the problem, (3) positing a **hypothesis** both as a logical means of locating the data and as an aid to resolving the problem, and (4) empirically testing the hypothesis by processing and interpreting the data to see whether the interpretation of them will resolve the question that initiated the research" (Leedy, 1997, pp. 94-95).
2. "A set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena" (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 9).

THINKING ABOUT THEORY | All Scientific Inquiry Is Value-Laden

Science writer Shawn Lawrence Otto would argue that the elevated respect afforded to the physical and social sciences, to the positivists and postpositivists, is not as high as this text's discussion might lead you to believe. "At its core, science is a reliable method for creating knowledge, and thus power," he wrote, "Because science pushes the boundaries of knowledge, it pushes us to constantly refine our ethics and morality, and that is always political. But beyond that, science constantly disrupts hierarchical power structures and vested interests in a long drive to give knowledge, and thus power, to the individual, and that process is also political … Every time a scientist makes a factual assertion—Earth goes around the sun, there is such a thing as evolution, humans are causing climate change—it either supports or challenges somebody's vested interests" (2011). Yes, as you read, physical *scientists* may be the dreamers, the fixers, the guardians, but their work is increasingly likely to be just as unsatisfying to some as that of the social scientists.

Public reaction to the theory of evolution and the science behind climate change offer two obvious examples. Vincent Cassone, chair of the University of Kentucky's biology department, defends evolution as the central organizing principle of all the natural sciences, "The theory of evolution is the fundamental backbone of all biological research. There is more evidence for evolution than there is for the theory of gravity, than the idea that things are made up of atoms, or Einstein's theory of relativity. It is the finest scientific theory ever devised." Yet the legislature of his state challenged the teaching of evolution in Kentucky public schools (Blackford, 2012). Across America, 46 percent of college graduates do not accept the theory of evolution; even 25 percent with graduate degrees deny its validity. Climate scientists do not fare much better. Despite overwhelming evidence that the earth is warming, that human activity contributes to that change, and that the oceans are rising, the Virginia legislature banned the term "sea-level rise" from a state-commissioned study of the problem because it was a "left-wing term." It replaced it with "recurrent flooding" (both in Pollitt, 2012).

Why the resistance to even traditional physical sciences? Mr. Otto answers, "The very essence of the scientific process is to question long-held assumptions about the nature of the universe, to dream up experiments that test those questions, and, based on the observations, to incrementally build knowledge that is independent of our beliefs and assumptions" (2011). Still, this doesn't explain why social scientists seem to suffer greater criticism than their physical science colleagues? Why do you think this is the case?

3. "A method … by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency—by something upon which our thinking has no effect….The method must be such that the ultimate conclusion of every man [*sic*] shall be the same. Such is the method of science. Its fundamental hypothesis … is this: There are real things whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them" (Peirce, 1955, p. 18).

Throughout the last century and into this one, some social researchers have tried to apply the scientific method to the study of human behavior and society. As you'll soon see, an Austrian immigrant to the United States, Paul Lazarsfeld, was an important advocate of applying social research methods to the study of mass media. But although the essential logic of the scientific method is quite simple, its application in the social (rather than physical) world is necessarily more complicated. Philosopher Karl Popper, whose 1934 *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* is regarded as the foundation of the scientific method, explained, "Long-term