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Human and Mediated Communication around the World

A Comprehensive Review and Analysis

 Springer

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Preface

This book is meant for students, teachers, researchers, journalists, media managers, media producers, and anyone else who wants to understand the working of communication and the media around the world. According to Thusu (2009), “thinking outside the national, ethnic, religious, cultural boxes is not only a practical necessity but an ethical imperative.” Along with globalization, the world of communication has changed, and this change has been influenced by increased literacy and education levels, but even more strongly by the advent of the Internet, which has both widened and narrowed our communication. By principle, we can communicate with anyone in the world, but by nature we do not do so. Everywhere in the world, people use the new social media mostly to communicate with people who are emotionally close. The classic media increasingly strengthen national identities. Everywhere in the world, even with the simplest means people can produce content that reflects their own desired lifestyles. Global formats are sold to be locally adapted. How come there is not one global communication format? Why do people prefer media content and forms that are close to their own cultural values? In communication and media studies, too little attention is given to cultural differences. That is what this book is doing. It presents an integrated approach to understanding the working of communication and the media, including electronic means of communication as hybrid media of human and mediated communication in the different parts of the world.

Several authors have pointed at the need to de-Westernize media studies to make room for other than Western perspectives. The universalistic approach of Western communication theory is not sufficiently recognized by communication researchers around the world who will have to accept other frames of mind that exist parallel to what they are used to.

All forms of communication, whether interpersonal, mediated, or mass communication, vary along with cultural values. These are in the heads of people who use and who produce the media. In order to understand how communication and the media operate worldwide, we need to understand the working of human communication not only from the Western viewpoint but also in the context of other cultures, such as in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This cannot be done from the viewpoint

of one communication discipline. It needs an eclectic approach, drawing from various academic disciplines: from psychology, cross-cultural psychology, anthropology, linguistics, sociology, philosophy, history, and more.

If we want to understand what is happening in this new world of communication and media, we first have to understand the different cultural values and how these influence communication and media behavior. Our worldviews, how we think and perceive the world in which we live, are based on our ideas of the self, our relationships with others, our beliefs in God or other Supreme Beings, and the ethics of the societies in which we live, which are all interrelated and can be traced back through the centuries. For the world regions, this book points at a number of worldviews that can help understand communication behavior.

This book draws from an enormous amount of literature on communication and media theory spread over many different competing intellectual traditions. It summarizes findings from a wealth of academic studies of the peculiarities of media products in different countries as well as the roles of media in different societies, thus reflecting the state of the art of comparative communication and media research. The book looks at the influence of culture both in the etic and in the emic way, describing communication within specific countries and regions but also using cultural models to compare cultures.

To many communication scholars, I may not be the obvious person to produce a book about communication theory as my first studies of communication were related to the working of advertising. Yet, from the 1970s onward, I have been intrigued by the mechanisms of communication. My later endeavors to grasp the consequences of culture for communication behavior made me decide to write this book. I got much help from many academics in the various parts of the world. There are many academic and commercial databases from which I could draw, and being retired I had the time to read, study, and think. To understand what is happening now, I had to look at history, following Asante saying that communication draws from “living tradition that is always invented and reinvented and proactively blending the old and the new.” That is the character of our new world of communication. With this book, I hope to contribute a little bit to an understanding of differences in human values, thinking, and behavior and, consequently, communication and the media. The book cannot cover all countries and cultures, so it does not do justice to all particularities of the world but uses examples which a good student should be able to extend.

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