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Human and Mediated Communication around the World

A Comprehensive Review and Analysis

 Springer

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ISBN 978-3-319-01248-3 ISBN 978-3-319-01249-0 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-01249-0
Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013948751

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Printed on acid-free paper

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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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Contents

1	Communication	1
	Human Communication	2
	Types of Communication	5
	Mediated Communication	7
	Intended and Unintended Communication	8
	Mass Communication	11
	Concepts in the Communication Discourse	13
	Information	13
	Meaning	15
	Worldview	17
	Culture	19
	Modern–Traditional	20
	Cultural Hegemony	24
	Nonverbal Communication	25
	Globalization and Communication	27
	Global Flow of Information and Communication	28
	The Global Village: Cultural Homogenization?	29
	Intercultural and Cross-Cultural Communication	32
	About Communication Theory	33
	Conclusions	36
	Literature	36
2	Orality and Literacy	41
	Speech	41
	Language	43
	Orality	48
	Rhetoric	51
	Comparative Rhetoric	54
	Literacy, Writing, and Reading	55
	Writing	56
	Reading	59

Electronic Communication, Literacy, and Secondary Orality	62
Conclusions.....	63
Literature.....	64
3 European and American Communication Theories.....	67
European and North American Communication Theories.....	68
Western Worldviews	68
Individualism.....	69
Religion.....	71
Schools of Communication Theory	72
Rhetoric Tradition	73
Classic Models of Communication: Process Orientation	75
Semiotics.....	76
Empirical and Critical Schools	78
The Network Society	79
Comparing Communication Theories and Research	81
Cross-Cultural Differences.....	82
I-It or Dialogue: Buber Versus Bakhtin	84
Implications for Mediated Communication	85
Latin America	86
Mestizaje and Hybrid Cultures	87
Latin American Worldviews	90
Personhood.....	90
Communality and Hierarchy.....	92
Time	94
Spirituality, Religion, and Beliefs.....	94
Implications for Communication Behavior.....	97
Consequences for Mediated Communication.....	98
Communication Theory	100
Conclusions.....	101
Literature.....	101
4 Asian Communication.....	105
Asian Worldviews and Communication.....	106
Confucianism	106
Buddhism	108
Hinduism.....	109
Taoism.....	111
Similarities and Differences Across Asia	112
Harmony.....	113
Indirectness	114
In-Group and Out-Group	115
Adaptation to Context and Situation.....	115
Taciturnity and Silence.....	118
Empathy, Mind Reading.....	119

Country-Specific Communication Models	120
China	121
Japan.....	124
Korea	127
Philippines.....	127
A Model of Asian Interpersonal Communication.....	128
Communication Theory and Research.....	129
Consequences for Mediated Communication	130
Conclusions.....	132
Literature.....	132
5 African and West-Asian Communication	137
Sub-Saharan Africa.....	139
African Worldviews	139
Ubuntu.....	141
Community.....	142
Personhood.....	144
Spirituality, Religion, and Beliefs	148
Time	152
Implications for Communication Behavior.....	153
Oral Literacy	154
Indirectness	156
Communication Adjusted to Context and Hierarchy	157
Consequences for Mediated Communication	159
Communication Theory	161
North Africa and Western Asia.....	161
Arab–Islamic Worldviews.....	162
Islam and Communication	165
Consequences for Mediated Communication	167
Conclusions.....	168
Literature.....	168
6 Culture and Cultural Dimensions	173
Human Values	174
The Desirable and the Desired	175
Culture.....	176
Layers of Culture	177
Nations: Homogeneity, Heterogeneity, and Hybrid Cultures.....	178
Comparing Cultures	181
Measuring Cultural Values.....	182
Individual and Culture Level.....	186
Dimensions of Culture	187
Orientations Toward Time	190
Closure	190
Time Is Linear or Circular.....	190
Monochronic and Polychronic Time.....	191

The Three Major Dimensional Models.....	192
Individualism and Collectivism	193
Power Distance.....	194
Long-/Short-Term Orientation	196
Assertiveness and Male–Female Roles.....	197
Uncertainty Avoidance.....	199
Other Dimensions	200
Cause–Effect	201
Conclusions.....	202
Literature.....	202
7 Culture, Self, and Communication.....	205
The Concept of Self	205
Personality, Identity, and Image.....	207
The Self in Relation to Others	209
The Presentation of Self.....	210
Self-Expression and Self-Disclosure	212
In-Group and Out-Group	213
Public and Private Space.....	215
Family and Relationships Parents–Children	215
Mental Processes.....	217
Cognition and Cognitive Styles.....	217
Learning and Memory.....	218
Cognitive Dissonance.....	218
Categorization	219
Perception.....	220
Field Dependency.....	221
Aesthetic Experience and Preference.....	222
Color Perception	224
The Creative Process.....	225
Locus of Control	226
Information Processing.....	228
Communication Styles.....	230
Verbal Styles	231
Nonverbal Styles	232
Interpersonal Communication Styles	232
Communication and the Electronic Media.....	234
Mass Communication Styles.....	235
Conclusions.....	236
Literature.....	237
8 Media Behavior and Culture	243
The Mass Media.....	244
The Press	244
Television and Radio.....	246
Hybrid Media.....	250

The World Wide Web.....	251
The Information Function of the Internet	254
The Social Function of the Internet	256
Social Network Services	257
Presentation of Self in Social Media.....	260
The Weblog or Blog	261
The Internet and Children	264
The Mobile Phone.....	265
Usage and Activities	267
Psychosocial Effects.....	269
Predictions of New Media.....	273
Conclusions.....	274
Literature.....	275
9 Communication Products and Culture.....	281
Reflection of Culture in Communication Products.....	281
Film, TV, and Literature.....	282
Popular Music	285
The Media	287
Oramedia.....	287
The Press	289
Broadsheet Versus Tabloid.....	290
Television.....	292
TV Products and Culture.....	294
Television Programs Crossing Borders.....	296
Website Design and Culture.....	301
Conclusions.....	303
Literature.....	304
10 Mass Media, Journalism, Society, and Culture.....	309
Roles and Purposes of the Mass Media in Society	309
The Normative View of the Role of Media in Society.....	310
Roles of Media Across Societies	312
Media Systems Across Cultures	314
Models of Media Systems.....	314
State and Commercial Influences Across Countries.....	318
Press Freedom and Censorship	323
Journalism and Culture	325
Self-Censorship.....	330
Gatekeeping.....	332
Framing	332
Citizen Journalism.....	336
The News	337
International News Flows.....	340
The Internet and Society	344
Conclusions.....	346
Literature.....	347

11 Theories of Mass Communication and Media Effects	
Across Cultures	355
Mass Communication Theories	355
Theories of Direct Media Influences: Stimulus Response Theories.....	356
Theories of Indirect Media Influences	359
Media and Cultural Imperialism Effects	367
Effects of Exported Media Programs	371
The Media and National Identity	373
Diffusion Theory	375
Diffusion of Innovations	375
News Diffusion	378
Viral Diffusion	381
Mass Communication Research Worldwide	382
Research Across Regions	383
Research Techniques	387
Conclusions.....	388
Literature.....	388
12 Behavior Change Communication	395
Development Communication	396
The Role of Media in Development Processes	398
Participatory Development Communication	402
Public Relations Across Cultures.....	404
Relations and Publics Across Cultures	404
Global or Local	407
Advertising Across Cultures	408
Standardize or Adapt.....	409
Advertising Styles	410
Conclusions.....	412
Literature.....	413
Index	417