**Four Eras of Media Theory**

Theories will be discussed chronologically, so you have a broad and historically grounded perspective on media. It does not mean that theories developed in orderly, chronologically stable way. Also, older theories are not completely obsolete. Newer theories, as radical as it look, for the most part are updated version of old ideas. *Notes: These theories were developed in the Western culture context. Are they applicable in non-Western cultures? This is a big question.*

1. **The Era of Mass Society and Mass Culture Theory.**Begun at the 2nd half of the 19th century. Mass society theory: Perspective on Western, industrial society that attributess an influential but often negative role to media. Media was feared because it was regarded as a threat to the traditional social order. The audience was considered as a passive target of media. *Will be discussed later: [Gemeinschaft vs. Gesellschaft (Tonnies)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gemeinschaft_and_Gesellschaft" \t "_blank);*[*mechanical and organic solidarity (Durkheim)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mechanical_and_organic_solidarity)*;*[*propaganda theory*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Propaganda_model)*;*[*magic bullet theories*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypodermic_needle_model)*;*[*normative theories of media*](http://www.slideshare.net/ArielForeman/normative-theory-2225358)*;*[*social responsibility theory*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_responsibility)*; etc.*
2. **The Emergence of a Scientific Perspective.**Starting in 1940s, especially by [Paul Lazarsfeld](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Lazarsfeld) who fled from Nazi Germany to the US. The use of scientific approach, carefully designed field experiment and measurement, to observe media influence on society. “Media were not as powerful as previously imagined” Thus, the effect of media towards the audience is limited. “People had numerous ways of resisting media influence and were influenced by many competing factors”. “Media seemed to reinforce existing social trends and strenghthen rather that threaten the status quo”. We will discuss the studies by Lazarsfeld, [Hovland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Hovland" \o "Carl Hovland" \t "_blank), etc.
3. **The Era of Limited Effects.**By the mid-1960, the debate between mass society and limited effects was over, in which the latter gained more support. The empirical research findings confirmed the latter view. Since no “big problem” in media, [Berelson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Berelson" \t "_blank) (1959) declared the field communication research to be dead. During the 1960s and into the 1970s, the limited effects paradigm dominated American mass communication research. We will discuss: [information flow theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_flow_(information_theory)), [diffusion theory](http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Communication_Theory/Diffusion_of_Innovations), [phenomenistic theory](http://www.scribd.com/doc/51171906/Media-Studies" \t "_blank), etc.
4. **The Era of Cultural Criticism.**Mass society notions continued to flourish in Europe. Both left wing and right wing concerns about the power of media, learning from the trauma of the WW II. During the 1960s, neomarxist in Britain developed a school of social theory widely referred to as [**British cultural studies**](http://webdelprofesor.ula.ve/humanidades/anderzon/materias/materiales/Turner2003_British_Cultural_Studies_3rdEd_An_Introduction.pdf)**.**Neomarxist: Social theorists asserting that media enable dominant social elites to maintain power. In North America, there was an attempt ot create an “american culture studies” (Innis and McLuhan, for example).

**The Emergence of Moderate Effects;**The limited effects paradigm have undergone a transformation, due to the pressure of cultural studies and new comm technology. The idea of *active audience that uses media content to create meaningful experience.*Acknowledges that media effects can occur over longer period of time (while limited effect was unable to understand the media role in cultural changes).

**The diversity of theory in mass communication**

So you’ll find many theories in mass comm. No single theory could explain all aspects of mass comm. There will not be a “final theory” in mass comm. Macroscopic theory and microcospic theory. It is difficult to implement scientific method to social phenomena. There are four reasons why it is difficult to implement scientific method to social phenomena:

* Most of the significant and interesting forms of human behavior are quite difficult to measure
* Human behavior is exceedingly complex
* Humans have goals and are self-reflexive
* The simple notion of causality is sometimes troubling when it is applied to ourselves

**Conclusion:**The situation is complicated because social science itself is somewhat schizophrenic—it is many different things to many different people. However, theories need to be developed to understand the phenomenon, albeit partially