

## Review

# International communication at the crossroads

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Theories have their own history and reflected the concerns of the time in which they were developed. This unit examines some theories that offer ways of approaching the subject of international communication and assesses how useful their explanations are, in terms of an understanding of the process involved. Both Marxists and world-system theorists stress the importance of rise, of the global dominance of a capitalist market economy, that is penetrating the entire globe-pan-capitalism, is how a commentator described the phenomenon (Tehrani, 1999). With the collapse of communism, the disintegration of Soviet, and the Eastern block, seen by many as alternative to capitalism, the shift within Western democracies, from a public to private sector capitalism, and the international trend towards liberalization and privatization have contributed to the acceptance of the capitalist market as a global system.

**Key words:** Communication, international communication, development communication, mass communication, free flow, convergence, global news content, cold war, Marx, capitalism, globalization, Second World War, political economy, the Soviet Union.

## INTRODUCTION

Theories have their own history and reflected the concerns of the time in which they were developed. This unit examines some theories that offer ways of approaching the subject of international communication and assesses how useful their explanations are in terms of an understanding of the process involved. This is by no means of comprehensive account of theories of communication, nor does it set out on an all embracing theorization of the subject, but looks at the key theories and their proponents to contextualize the analysis of contemporarily global communication system. It is not surprising that theories of communication came into force in parallel with the stupendous social and economic changes of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, reflecting the significance of the role of communications in the growth of capitalism and empire, and drawing also on advances in science and the understanding of the natural world (Blake and Haroldsen., 1975).

One of the debutant concepts of communication, developed by the French philosopher Claude Henri de Saint Simon (1760 to 1825), used the analogy of the living organism, posing that the development of a system of communication route (roads, canals, and railways) and a credit system (banks) was crucial for an industrializing

society and that the circulation of money, for example, was equivalent to that of blood for the human heart (Mattelart, 1998). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, theories of international communication evolved into a discrete discipline within the new social sciences, and in each era have prefaced contemporary concerns about political, economic and technological changes and their impact on society and culture. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, during and after the First World War, a debate took place about the role of communication in propagating the competitive economic and military objectives of the imperial powers, exemplified in the work of Walter (1922) on “public opinion” and Harold (1927) on “war time propaganda”.

After the Second World War, theories of communication multiplied in response to new developments in technology and media. First, radio and then television, and the increasingly integrated international economic and political system. Two broad, though often interrelated, approaches to the rising communication can be discerned in the political-economy approach concerned with the underlying structures of economic and political power relations and the perspectives of cultural studies, focusing mainly on the role of communication and media in the process of the creation and maintaining of shared values and meanings

(Golding and Murdoch., 1997; Doring., 1999). The political economy approach has its roots in the critique of capitalism introduced by Karl Marx (1818 to 1883), but it has evolved over the years to incorporate a wide range of critical thinkers (Arora and Laswell, 1969).

Central to a Marxian interpretation of international communication is the question of power, which ultimately is seen as an instrument of control by the ruling classes, (Burgoon., 1994). Much of the pioneer research on international communication has been an examination of the pattern of ownership and production in the media and communication industries, analyzing these transnational class interests. Moreover, the influence on international communication of the growing literature of cultural studies, increasingly transnational in intent, if not yet in perspectives grew significantly in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Social science analyses of mass communication have been enriched by concepts from the study of literature and the humanities.

### **Flow of information**

After the Second World War and the establishment of a bi-polar world of free market capitalism and state socialism, theories of international communication became part of the new Cold War discourse. For the protagonist of capitalism, the primary function of international communication was to promote democracy, freedom of expression and markets, while the Marxists were vocal for greater state regulation on communication and media outlets. The concept of the “free flow of information” reflected Western, and specifically the U.S., antipathy to state regulation and censorship of the media and its use for propaganda by its communist opponents (DeFleur., 1970). The “free flow” doctrine was essentially a part of liberal, free market discourse that championed the rights of media proprietors to sell wherever and whatever they wished (Wood., 1997). As most of the world’s leading media resources and media related capital, then as now, were constructed in the West, it was the media proprietors in Western countries, their governments and national business communities that had most to gain.

The concept of “free flow”, therefore, served both economic and political purposes. Media organizations of the media-affluent countries could hope to dissuade others erecting trade barriers to their products or from making it difficult to gather news or make programmes on their territories. Their argument drew on premises of democracy, freedom of expression, the media’s role as “public watchdog” and their assumed global relevance (Siebert and Schramm 1956). For their compatriot business, “free flow” assisted them in advertising and marketing their goods and services in foreign markets, through media vehicles whose information and entertainment products championed the

Western way of life and its values of capitalism and individualism (MacBride., 1980). For Western governments, “free flow” helped to ensure the continuing and reciprocated influence of Western media on global markets, strengthening the West in its ideological battle with the so called Soviet Union. The doctrine also contributed, in generally subtle rather than direct ways, vehicles for communication of U.S. government points of view to international audience (McQuail., 2003).

### **Discourses of globalization**

Despite the controversial nature of the utility of globalization as a concept in understanding international communication, there is little doubt that new information and communication technologies have made global interconnectivity a reality (Ronald and Rodman., 2008). It has been argued that “Globalization” may be the concept of the 1990s, a key idea by which we understand the transition of human society into the third millenniums’ (Waters, 1995). The term has also been used more generally to describe contemporary developments in communication and culture. In its most liberal interpretation, globalization is seen as fostering international economic integration and as a mechanism for promoting global liberal capitalism. For those whose capitalism is the “end” of history (Fukuyama., 1992), globalization is to be welcomed for the effect that it has in promoting global markets and liberal democracy. The economic conception of globalization view it as denoting a qualitative shift from a largely national to a globalized economy, in which although national economies continue to predominate within nations, they are often subordinate to transactional process and transactions (Hirst and Thompson., 2008).

The arguments of economic globalization focus on the increasingly internationalized system of manufacture and production, on growing world trade, on the extent of international capital flows and, crucially, on the role of transnational corporations (Schramm and Porter 1982). Liberal interpretations of globalization see markets playing the crucial role at the expense of the states. A Japanese business strategist claims that in the globalized economy the nation-state has become irrelevant and market capitalism is producing a “cross border civilization” (Ohmae., 1995). In this context, both Marxists and world-system theorists stress the importance of rise of the global dominance of a capitalist market economy that is penetrating the entire globe-pan-capitalism is how a commentator described the phenomenon (Tehrani., 1999). With the collapse of communism, the disintegration of Soviet, and the Eastern block, seen by many as alternative to capitalism, the shift within Western democracies, from a public to private sector capitalism, and the international trend towards liberalization and privatization have contributed to the acceptance of the

capitalist market as a global system (Singh, 2001).

As a matter of fact global mass, development and international communication content have also fallen in the capitalistic trap, thus a free flow of information is prevalent, and sometimes it is also made in the owner's interest. Interestingly, international communication content is suffering into a new malady called "biasness". Leading nations and the so called developed countries, made the content in favor of their political, economic and social policies, and imposed such on the weaker sections of the world deliberately. The "information imperialism" goes on. Truly, "international communication" is at the crossroads.

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