

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# The Evolution of Media Effects Theory: A Six-Stage Model of Cumulative Research

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*The literature of media effects is frequently characterized as a three-stage progression initially embracing a theory of strong effects followed by a repudiation of earlier work and new model of minimal effects followed by yet another repudiation and a rediscovery of strong effects. We argue that although this dramatic and somewhat romantic simplification may be pedagogically useful in introductory courses, it may prove a significant impediment to further theoretical refinement and progress in advanced scholarship. We analyze the citation patterns of 20,736 scholarly articles in five communication journals with special attention to the 200 most frequently cited papers in an effort to provide an alternative six-stage model of, we argue, cumulative media effects theories for the period 1956–2005.*

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This is an article about the last 50 years of communication effects research. It aspires to develop two arguments. The first is that the evolving character of this research reveals an underlying structure moving from relatively simple models of persuasion and prospective attitude change to more sophisticated and layered models as scholars successively address the conditions and contexts of communication effects. The progression is cumulative, we argue, because once an effect of some sort has been identified, subsequent research can systematically address the conditions under which such an effect is diminished or strengthened. The second argument is that this underlying structure is routinely obscured and the advance of cumulative scientific refinement is potentially derailed by a widely held construction of this history known as the “minimal-effects hypothesis.” We can demonstrate empirically through citation analysis that the first argument is true, although the structure of citations is modest rather than dramatic. We are unable to prove that the second is true, although we can identify what we believe is ample anecdotal evidence. On the second argument, we would be pleased to have successfully raised the issue rather than conclusively won the point.

We start with the notion of “media effects.” It represents one of the core ideas of communication research since its inception. Elihu Katz (2001b) characteristically

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puts it most directly in positing simply that communication research “is about effect. It could have been otherwise—consider the study of art, for example—but it is not” (p. 9472). Some trace the intellectual origins of communication scholarship back hundreds or even thousands of years (Peters, 1999). But the modern field of scholarship defined by scholarly associations, key journals, and academic departments is roughly a half-century old. The field has grown dramatically. The membership of the seven scholarly communication associations in the United States numbers over 10,000, with over 1,000 doctoral students currently enrolled and preparing to enter the field as scholars and practitioners. Thus, at the 50-year mark, it seems appropriate to ask—how much progress have we made? Focusing on the broadly defined issue of media effects, is there evidence of accumulative theoretical progress, scientific convergence on key findings, and improved methods of measurement and analysis?

Some analysts have suggested that we have witnessed a troubling lack of progress. The question of progress and disciplinary identity has been addressed in the *Journal of Communication* under the heading “Ferment in the Field” (Gerbner, 1983; Levy & Gurevitch, 1993) and in several recent presidential addresses of the International Communication Association’s annual meeting (Bryant, 2004; Craig, 2005; Donsbach, 2006). One sometimes gets the impression we are still debating the same fundamental questions that inaugurated the field in midcentury. A particularly cogent analysis, focusing on the media and children, makes the case that we actually recycle strikingly similar questions about effects—almost always defined as negative effects—addressing in turn the historical sequence of mass communication technology, from movies and comic books to television and, more recently, video games (Wartella & Reeves, 1985).

Robert Craig’s (1999) widely cited article paints a cautious picture of theoretical convergence and potential progress:

Communication theory as an identifiable field of study does not yet exist. Rather than addressing a field of theory, we appear to be operating primarily in separate domains. Books and articles on communication theory seldom mention other work on communication theory except within narrow . . . specialties and schools of thought. Except within these little groups, communication theorists apparently neither agree nor disagree about much of anything. There is no canon of general theory to which they all refer. There are no common goals that unite them, no contentious issues that divide them. For the most part, they simply ignore each other. (1999, pp. 119–120)

To support his fragmentation thesis, Craig cites Anderson’s (1996) content analysis of seven prominent communication theory textbooks, which identified a disconcerting abundance of some 249 distinct “theories.” Furthermore, Anderson found that only 22% of these theories appeared in more than one of the seven books, and only 7% were included in more than three books.

Other analyses of the literature appear to support Craig’s (1999) cautious appraisal. Riffe and Freitag (1998) found that only a quarter of the articles they studied included

an “explicit theoretical framework.” Kamhawi and Weaver’s (2003) analysis of a representative sample of two decades of articles from 10 mass communication journals concluded that only 30% of the articles mentioned a theory explicitly and an additional 9% appeared to imply a theory. Bryant and Miron (2004) reviewed 1,806 articles from communication journals from 1956 through 2000 and found that only 576 (32%) included some theory, and of the 604 different theories addressed in these articles only 26 were cited in more than 10 of the articles.

The thesis of this article is that this skepticism is misdirected. The theoretical anchor points of an evolving theory of mass communication effects, we believe, are evident and frequently cited. So why the pessimism? The core problem may be some confusion about the very concept of communication effects itself. We will argue that there is a widely accepted “received wisdom” about the history of the field positing an opposition of “minimal” versus “significant” effects and that this characterization may have some unfortunate effects on the design and practice of communication effects research. We offer analysis of the citation patterns of a sample of the 200 most frequently cited articles in the field of communication effects focusing on patterns of reference to 36 seminal books and articles and provide an alternative, more positive history of what we have come to identify as six sequential and accumulative stages of media effects research. Rather than simply repudiating previous scholarship, in our view, a close reading reveals that these key articles cumulatively identify an increasingly sophisticated set of social, cultural, and structural conditions and cognitive mechanisms that help explain when mass-mediated messages do and do not affect the beliefs and opinions of audience members.

### **The received history of the field**

The dominant historical narrative of communication effects research posits three stages pivoting on alternative notions of significant versus minimal effects (see, e.g., Berger & Chaffee, 1987; Bryant & Thompson, 2002a; Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1982; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1988; Delia, 1987; Katz, 1980, 1987; Keppinger, 2008; Noelle-Neumann, 1973; Perse, 2007; Power, Kubey, & Kiousis, 2002; Schramm & Roberts, 1971; Wartella, 1996; Wicks, 1996).

In the beginning (roughly the 1930s through the 1950s), we find the “magic bullet theory” or alternatively the “hypodermic effects theory.” According to this simplistic paradigm, like a bullet or a needle, if the message reached its target its “effects,” typically persuasive effects, would be immediate and evident. The notion was frequently attributed to Harold Lasswell, whose work on propaganda and psychopathology posited an all-powerful government propagandist manipulating passive and atomized audience members who lacked independent sources of information (Lasswell, 1930, 1935). The theory is also associated with a notion of a mechanical transmission model of direct effects linked to early theorists of information engineering, such as Claude Shannon (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). With the growth of the industrialized mass media, especially radio and later television, and the apparent success of European totalitarian propaganda, such a view was culturally and historically resonant; or,

as Katz puts it, “in the air” (Katz, 1960). Subsequent scholarship traced the origins of the bullet and needle concepts and revealed that they were not used by those to whom they were attributed and do not accurately characterize the theorizing about media effects of the early researchers, which was actually much more sophisticated and nuanced (Bineham, 1988; Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1982; Lubken, 2008; Power et al., 2002; Sproule, 1989). The narrative is still in use, however, because it relates a memorable storyline and allows the storyteller to introduce the second stage of research in the 1950s and 1960s: the “minimal-effects school.”

Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates at Columbia University “opened a new era of thinking” by rejecting “the old hypothesis that the media have great power” (De Fleur & Dennis, 1981, pp. 294–297). The minimal-effects terminology comes from the seminal review and summarization of research to date: *The Effects of Mass Communication*, published in 1960 by Lazarsfeld’s student, Joseph Klapper. Key findings that only a tiny fraction of voters actually changed their vote intentions during an election campaign, that audience motivations and prior beliefs influenced the interpretation of persuasive messages, and that messages were often discussed among opinion leaders and friends, leading to a mediation via two-step flow, as the narrative is told, reinforced this minimal-effects conclusion. The fact that Klapper was employed by the CBS television network and that part of his job was to testify in Washington to fend off possible regulation resulting from the potential effects of television in the domains of smoking, sexuality, and violence added to the dramaturgy of the story and the vilification of Klapper.

In the third and current stage of theoretical development, according to the narrative, the unfair and dismissive minimal-effects notion becomes the red flag to the bull as a new generation of scholars seeks to justify the discipline itself and to demonstrate significant effects through new theories, better measurement tools, and improved methodological designs. Klapper becomes the rather convenient *bête noire* as scholars demonstrate various “not so minimal effects” (Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982) or demonstrate that if the media could not tell you what to think they were “stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The polarity between minimal effects and big effects continues as a central thematic, sometimes in the foreground, as in McGuire’s (1986) “The Myth of Massive Media Impact” and Zaller’s (1996) response “The Myth of Massive Media Impact Revived,” or more often as a back drop for various empirical and theoretical inquiries (Bennett & Manheim, 2006; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

Our thesis is that, despite its pedagogical allure, the minimal-effects/significant-effects polarity could function as an impediment to theorizing—in essence diminishing our understanding of real progress in theory and research that has characterized the last 50 years of scholarship. There are three elements to our argument.

First, the minimal-effects/significant-effects polarity conflates the empirical effect size of media impacts and their theoretical and practical importance. A mathematically tiny effect can accumulate over time to play a decisive role. Frequently, as in many election campaigns, a tiny fraction of the electorate becomes a pivotal swing vote. In

the practical terms of electoral outcomes, the fact that the large majority of voters do not appear to be swayed by political ads and bumper stickers is simply beside the point. Numerically small and scientifically important results, in our view, require no apologies.

Second, the narrative unduly simplifies the history of communication research, and by diminishing earlier scholarship, it awkwardly puts younger scholars in the position of needlessly reinventing ideas and repeating research in a manner that is less constructive and accumulative. Lasswell's (1935) ideas about the interaction of psychopathology of national identity, for example, have new resonance in a post-9/11 world. Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1948) nuanced theorizing about conformity and status conferral provides abundant grist for modern-day critical theory and analysis (Katz, 1987; Simonson, 1999; Simonson & Weinmann, 2003). In addition, even Klapper's (1960) much derided compendium and analysis offers thoughtful discussion of the conditions under which media effects tend to be the strongest and advice on how further research might clarify our understanding of those conditionalities. A close reading of Klapper reveals that he called for further research on: (a) the psychological predispositions of audience members; (b) the situated social context of message reception; (c) the broader social, societal, and cultural context of message reception; and (d) the structure of beliefs among audience members, not just the direction of beliefs. Each of these four represents a critically important condition of the communication process, and each has served as a foundation for theoretical advancement and refinement. We will demonstrate that these foundational points are well represented in the literature and correspond to four of the six fundamental media effects theory clusters we derive from our citation analysis of the literature. For the record it should be noted that Klapper never used the phrase "minimal effects" in the book and concludes with just the opposite argument in his review, noting that the greatest danger in a summary of research is "the tendency to go overboard in blindly minimizing the effects and potentialities of mass communication" (Klapper, 1960, p. 251).

Third, the minimal-effects/significant-effects polarity we believe is a demonstrable impediment to the design and interpretation of media effects research and the evolution of an accumulative agreed-upon set of findings about the conditions that impede and facilitate those effects at the individual and aggregate level. We find, still as late as 1999, Emmers-Sommer and Allen in their overview of the field concluding: "Taken together, these findings can be used to lend insight for future research directions. Overall, we can conclude that the media do, indeed, have effects" (1999, p. 492). It would appear that even after 50 years, simply to demonstrate a statistically significant effect in the ongoing battle against the vestiges of Klapper's evil empire is sufficient justification for celebration and publication. The fact of the matter is that the research corpus in media effects documents a very impressive range of effects from no effect at all to very large effects. The challenge to our discipline is to systematically theorize and test the conditions that may facilitate or impede such effects and not simply to celebrate that the mean measure of effect size is larger now than the effect

sizes typically assessed by preceding generations of researchers. To be clear—our thesis is not that historically and currently many communication scholars do not see themselves as part of a three-stage evolution. They do. Indeed, they acknowledge their efforts to reject the stage-two “minimal effects” notion energetically and frequently. We argue instead that such a perspective may have unintended and unfortunate consequences.

### **The six-stage model**

There may be well over 100 published textbooks, scholarly articles, and reference book entries that attempt to summarize and organize the media effects field; so we entered this crowded terrain with some trepidation. For a sampling of this literature, see Lazarsfeld and Berelson (1960), Schramm (1960), Berelson and Steiner (1964), Berelson and Janowitz (1966), McGuire (1969, 1985), Schramm and Roberts (1971), Chaffee (1977), Comstock et al. (1978), Lang and Lang (1981), Roberts and Bachen (1981), Bryant and Zillmann (1986, 1994), Delia (1987), DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach (1988), Jeffres (1997), Katz (2001b), Perse (2001), Bryant and Thompson (2002b), Bryant and Miron (2004), Preiss, Gayle, Burrell, Allen, and Bryant (2007), Keppinger (2008), and Nabi and Oliver (2009).

Our strategy was to take a careful look at the literature of the field with an eye to who was citing whom. It was an iterative process moving back and forth between reading the highly cited articles and developing a typology of dominant theories that accurately reflected their central themes. We were inspired particularly by the typologies of Katz (2001a), Bryant and Miron (2004), and Nabi and Oliver (2009) and ultimately identified six historically sequential media effects theory clusters.<sup>1</sup> Each of these theoretical stages encompasses a number of explicitly labeled contributing subtheories, such as parasocial theory or agenda-setting theory. As is frequently the case in such scholarly traditions, the first publication or two utilizing and popularizing each theory became a routine and increasingly obligatory seminal citation for all who would follow. As a result, the tracking of intellectual parentage by citation analysis is relatively straightforward. Thus for the analysis of parasocial interaction, the citation of Horton and Wohl's (1956) paper is *de rigueur* and for agenda setting it is McCombs and Shaw's (1972) celebrated paper in *Public Opinion Quarterly*. We iterated back and forth between our basic typology and the active literature to try to capture, as best we could, all the explicit theories and associated seminal citations that were in active usage. Passing references were set aside to keep the list manageable and reserved to those theories that had not become abandoned and ignored. Our final working typology is composed of 6 clusters and 29 active subtheories, which are in turn defined by a total of 36 seminal books and articles (Table 1).

If we were just sorting prominent theories into labeled categories this would be but an artificial exercise. But the historically grounded six-stage model highlights what we believe is a significant and underappreciated structure of theoretical evolution in the field. In the earliest stage of persuasion research, the hypotheses are built around a rather straightforward notion of persuasive messages and attitude change. There

**Table 1** The Six-Stage Model of Media Effects Theory Clusters

Historical Stage	Theoretical Refinement
I. Persuasion Theories 1944–1963	Simple attitude change and behavioral modeling
1. Voting research (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Campbell et al., 1960)	
2. Shannon linear model (Shannon & Weaver, 1948)	
3. Lasswell linear model (Lasswell, 1948)	
4. Persuasion/attitude change (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953; McGuire, 1969)	
5. Social learning (Bandura & Walters, 1963)	
II. Active Audience Theories 1944–1986	Motivated attention
6. Attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Kelley, 1967)	
7. Uses & gratifications (Herzog, 1944; Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974)	
8. Parasocial theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956)	
9. Cognitive dissonance/social identity (Festinger, 1957; Tajfel, 1982)	
10. Minimal effects (Klapper, 1960)	
11. Selective exposure (Sears & Freedman, 1967)	
12. Disposition theory (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976)	
13. Media dependency (Ball-Rokeach & De Fleur, 1976)	
14. Elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986)	
III. Social Context Theories 1955–1983	Interpersonal context of communication
15. Two-step flow (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955)	
16. Diffusion theory (Rogers, 1962)	



**Table 1** Continued

Historical Stage	Theoretical Refinement
17. Knowledge gap theory (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970)	
18. Social networks/social capital (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 1995)	
19. Spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974)	
20. Third person theory (Davison, 1983)	
IV. Societal & Media Theories 1933–1978	Long-term accumulation of effects
21. Media hegemony/public sphere (Gramsci, 1933; Habermas, [1962] 1989)	
22. Channel effects (McLuhan, 1964)	
23. Social construction of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1966)	
24. Differential media exposure (Clarke & Fredin, 1978)	
25. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Jackson-Beeck, Jeffries-Fox, & Signorielli, 1978)	
V. Interpretive Effects Theories 1972–1987	
26. Agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)	Beyond attitude change—salience, accessibility, and structure of attitudes
27. Priming (Iyengar et al., 1982)	
28. Framing theory (Iyengar et al., 1987)	
VI. New Media Theories 1996–	
29. Computer-mediated communication (Walther, 1996)	Expanded two-way communication, networking, expanded content choice

*Note:* The six clusters and 29 contributing research theories are defined by 36 seminal books and articles, 1933–1996 (seminal publications are listed in parentheses).



is little attention to the motivational orientation of the audience member, the social context of message exposure, the accumulation of effects over time, and so on. Such matters were the theoretical refinements that characterize the successive stages as scholarship systematically addressed which conditions might facilitate or diminish media effects as identified in the right-hand column of Table 1. We will review each of the six stages and then turn to the citation data, which describe the structure of cross-referencing.

*Persuasion Theories*, the first in this historical sequence, are characterized by direct and unmediated effects, typically based on persuasion and audience modeling of observed behavior. The seminal books and papers in this group span the interval 1944–1963. The study of political campaign effects, propaganda campaigns, attitude change, and social modeling of observed representations of behavior in the mass media especially among children characterizes these traditions of research. Shannon's information theory approach focused on the transmission of information rather than persuasion and up until the mid-1960s was viewed by some as a fundamental scientific basis for the social scientific as well as an engineering analysis of communication processes (Berlo, 1960; Schramm, 1955; Smith, 1966). Lasswell's "Who Says What to Whom With What Effect" and institutional/cultural level models of the function of communication for society are included here as well.

The second stage, which with nine subtheories is the largest cluster, is labeled *Active Audience Theories* with seminal studies published from 1944 to 1986. Like the preceding cluster of persuasion theories, the basic hypotheses here posit direct transmission of messages to atomized individuals. These theories do not pay particular attention to the individual's position in social structure or social organization. What distinguishes this cluster is a variety of propositions about the motivations and psychological orientations of audience members—thus the "active" audience (Bauer, 1964). In some cases these psychological orientations are likely to lessen an informational or persuasive effect (as in minimal effects and selective exposure); in other cases these orientations will reinforce and strengthen potential effects, such as in the case of parasocial and disposition theory. ELM theory (elaboration likelihood model) is located here rather than in the persuasion cluster because the hypothesized central route of cognitive processing emphasizes active evaluation and deliberation in response to a potentially persuasive message.

The third stage—*Social Context Theories*—focuses more heavily on situated social contexts and how individuals perceive messages to be influencing others in their social sphere. The seminal publications for this cluster span 1955–1983. The two-step and related multistep flow subtheories, for example, draw attention to the social embeddedness of sense-making as individuals rely on social cues and interpersonal conversation to interpret and contextualize complex media messages. Because of these theoretical interests, entirely different research and sampling techniques are often required instead of, or in addition to, traditional experimental and survey designs. Diffusion and knowledge gap theories trace rates of penetration of new ideas, opinions, and behaviors over time and among different social strata. Spiral-of-silence

and third person theory focus on perceptions of the persuasibility and beliefs of socially relevant others.

The fourth stage is labeled *Societal and Media Theories* and draws attention to the societal level (hegemony and public sphere theory) and accumulative individual level effects over longer periods of time, such as differential media exposure and cultivation theory. The hegemony, public sphere, and to some extent, cultivation traditions are associated with progressive political views and a critical perspective. The channel effect and differential media exposure theories are in large part neutral or even apolitical in orientation. This cluster is loosely linked, and although intellectually identifiable, it is not characterized by a high level of internal cross-citation.

The fifth stage, *Interpretive Effects Theories*, includes the related traditions of agenda-setting, priming, and framing theory. The authors in these traditions do much more than provide evidence of significant media effects. This research demonstrates an important extension and refinement of extant theory. In addition to assessing attitude change and learning as a result of exposure to media messages, these scholars examine how exposure may influence salience of, interpretation of, and cognitive organization of information and opinions to which individuals are exposed. When analysts characterize communication research as moving from media effects to media processing they may be referring to the new emphases in this fifth cluster of research (Chaffee, 1980).

Finally, perhaps as a placeholder for things to come, there is a newly evolving theoretical tradition focusing on new technologies and interactive properties, *New Media Theories*, in our terminology. At the moment, we are listing a single theory here under the headings human computer interaction (HCI) and/or computer-mediated communication. Much of the early work here focuses on human communication in organizational settings, contrasting mediated from face-to-face communication processes, so strictly speaking it only marginally represents a mass communication. Significant use of the Internet at home for interpersonal and mass communication evolved only in the late 1990s, so given the successive delays of the conduct of research, publication, and citation this work is just now establishing itself (Joinson, McKenna, Postmes, & Reips, 2007).

## Methods

### Sample and design

Our analysis of the structure of cumulative media effects theory is based on data drawn from the Institute for Scientific Information's extensive database of social scientific citation patterns collected since 1956. The database is accessible online as the *Thompson Reuters ISI Web of Knowledge* by subscription or through subscribing libraries. The full social science database (SSCI) contains over 3 million records of journal article citation lists from over 5,000 journals. In this study, we focus primarily on about 300 journals in politics, public opinion, social psychology, health communication, journalism, and related fields that typically cite articles and books on

media effects and are labeled by ISI as “communication” journals. Also, we focused on a subset of 20,736 articles published over the 50-year period in five particularly prominent mass communication research journals. These databases do not record the citations made in books and edited books, but when books and book chapters are cited in journal articles, the information is duly recorded. Thus, for example, we are able to track the number of citations in articles in the social sciences over time (from 1956 to 2005) of both Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee’s (1954) seminal book, *Voting*, and Davison’s (1983) influential article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* on the “Third Person Effect.”

Having derived the analytic typology described above and in Table 1 from the literature, we proceeded to track the patterns of citation over time of the seminal books and articles in social sciences generally and in five of the most prominent communication research journals. For the most part, the patterns of citation were very similar for the social sciences generally and the communication journals and most key publications were not cited much outside of the communication field. There were some exceptions. Shannon’s (1948) work is cited heavily in library science and information theory; Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960), Iyengar and Kinder (1987), Iyengar et al. (1982), and Gramsci and Habermas are cited frequently in political science and related fields. Rogers (1962 and subsequent editions) is cited broadly in the social sciences, including business and economics. Also, a number of psychologically oriented articles and books, such as those by Heider, Hovland, Kelley, Festinger, Bandura, and others, are cited widely across the behavioral sciences, especially psychology.

In the five-journal data set we culled the 200 most frequently cited articles that were subject to further analysis. As we were interested in patterns over time, rather than simply taking the top 200 of all time, we divided the 50-year span from 1956 to 2005 into 10 five-year intervals and sampled the 20 most frequently cited among articles published in each period. (This also helped to adjust for the fact that more recently published articles, by definition, have not yet had comparable time to accumulate a large number of citations.) Our sample of mass communication journals includes *The Journal of Communication* (1956–2005), *Public Opinion Quarterly* (1956–2005), *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (1956–2005), *Communication Research* (1974–2005), and *Human Communication Research* (1982–2005).

Some heavily cited articles, particularly in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, were narrowly methodological, focusing, for example, on survey sampling and questionnaire design and were excluded from the top 200. We note, of course, that these journals are not representative of the full diversity of the communication field and that a different set of journals may well have revealed a somewhat different set of patterns.

We assembled and carefully read all the top 200 articles and independently coded three levels of theoretical reference: (a) an explicit citation of one of the listed seminal works, (b) an explicit reference to a theoretical tradition in the article text for those cases where one of the listed seminal works was not cited, and (c) a clear indication

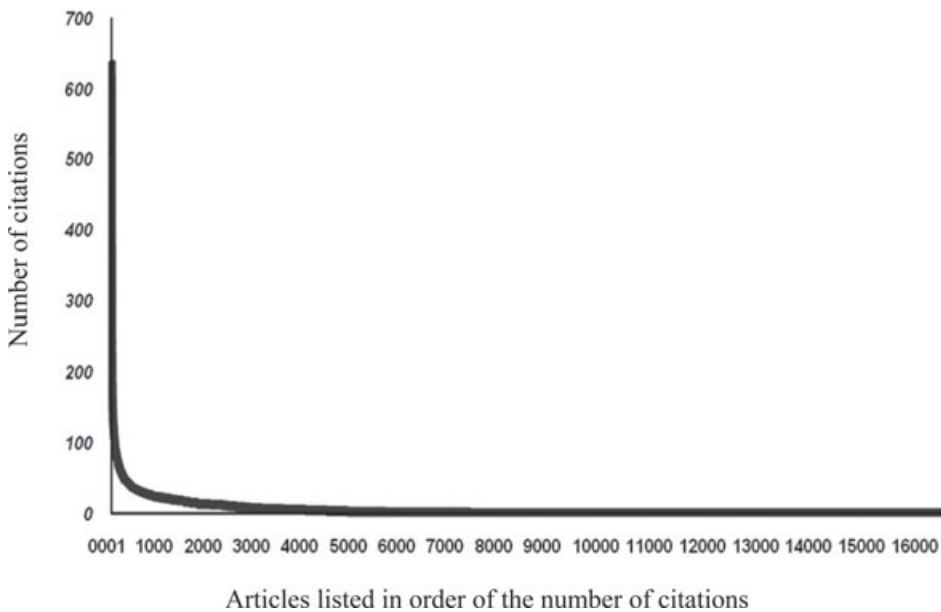
that a theoretical tradition was being utilized even when the identifying label, such as third person theory or spiral-of-silence, was not explicitly stated. As expected, intercoder reliability was very high on the first level, moderately high on the second level, and marginal on the third.<sup>2</sup> This recoding process that partially duplicates the character of the original ISI data set has an important quality that justifies the effort in addition to notation of theoretical references not tied to citations. Because we now had a full list of which of the 29 subtheories were cited in each of the 200 articles, we could now assess not just the frequency but the structure of citation, patterns of cocitation—key to the issue of cumulative theory building. Thus we could analyze, where any one theory was cited or otherwise mentioned, how many of the remaining other 28 theories were also cited or mentioned.<sup>3</sup>

### Analysis and results

Before addressing the citation patterns themselves, we want to draw the reader's attention to a prominent phenomenon in bibliometric data of the sort we have used. Robert K. Merton (1968) called it "The Matthew Effect" after the biblical epigram in the Book of Matthew that makes note of the self-reinforcing cycles of inequity—the rich tend to get richer as the poor get poorer. In scientific literatures, Merton notes, a more eminent researcher is much more likely to be cited and credited than a less well-known (or newer) researcher for the same basic work. Part of the phenomenon is the ritual citation of what becomes fashionably defined as seminal. Part may be the simple fact that researchers are much more likely to be aware of and cite those studies that are themselves frequently cited. The net result for most literatures, and certainly evident in communication, is a logistic curve whereby a few articles are cited frequently and most are not cited at all. Figure 1 illustrates the concentration-of-attention phenomenon among the 20,736 articles in our five-journal sample.

Fully 60% of the published articles in this sample are never cited. This pattern is widely recognized and typical of most scholarly literatures. Figure 1 includes self-citations by authors of their own work, which might lead one to expect a somewhat less skewed distribution. The database reveals a total of 98,095 citations of the 20,736 articles, which calculates out to the somewhat misleading statistic of an average number of citations per article of 4.73. A better measure, perhaps, given this distribution is the median or the mode, both of which are 0 as one can see from a visual inspection of the figure.

Given this pattern of concentration, one comes to appreciate the structural significance of the top 200 most cited articles—these 200, a mere 1% of all articles in the sample, attract 38% of all citations. Among the most frequently cited articles are McCombs and Shaw (1972), "Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media" (560 citations); Krugman (1965), "The Impact of Television Advertising: Learning Without Involvement" (384 citations); Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward a Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm" (281 citations); Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli's (1980), "The Mainstreaming of America: Violence Profile No 11" (276 citations); and Katz (1957) "The 2-Step Flow of Communication" (231 citations).<sup>4</sup>

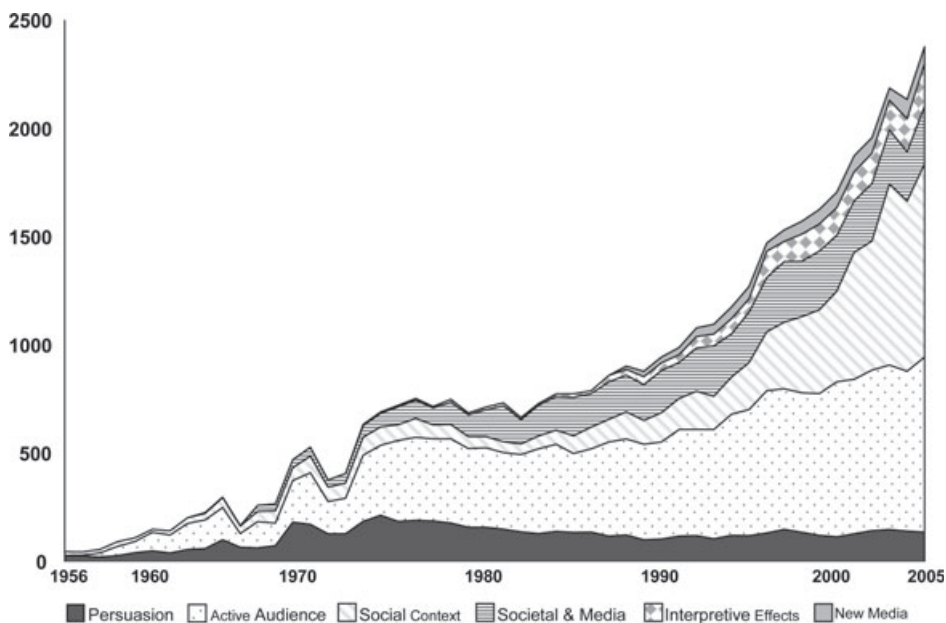


**Figure 1** Distribution of number of citations per article from highest to lowest among communication research articles 1956–2005.

The average number of citations per article in the top-200 sample for each five-year interval is about 100 citations with some expected falloff for the most recent five-year intervals, which have not yet had sufficient time to be read, utilized, and cited in published work given the inevitable multiyear delays. The total number of articles published in the communication field has been steadily expanding over this time period, but that growth is primarily a result of the introduction of new journals. For these five core journals the number of articles per year is roughly the same at about 400 per year, rising slightly in the middle decades and declining slightly in the number published per year in the last decade.

Given the dominant three-element historical communication research narrative of strong effects first embraced, then rejected, then rediscovered, one might expect a pattern of the rise and decline of opposing and successive literatures. It is demonstrably not the case (see Figure 2, derived from the 20,736-article data set). Only the first cluster, persuasion citations, declines, and the falloff is modest. Despite the strong pull of the Mathew Effect, scholars cite focused research on the conditions of media effects rather than a few celebrated citations that characterize the typical size of effects. Later, scholars may have seen themselves as part of a “strong-effects school,” but their patterns of citation reveal a richer and more detailed story.

This pattern of growth through the process of citing, building on, and refining previous work continues throughout the 50-year span for each of the other clusters. Indeed, theoretical innovation and integrative theorizing of previous work is a defining characteristic of the highly cited articles. Take, for example, the most



**Figure 2** Accumulative growth of media effects theories in the communication literature (average number of citations per year of 36 seminal articles).

Source: Full ISI Social Science Citation Dataset.

frequently cited article from our sample in the 1961–1965 period—Kelman’s (1961) article in *Public Opinion Quarterly*, “Processes of Opinion Change”—which is cited 476 times. It represents an interpretive review of the literature, still at that time dominated by notions of persuasion and direct, propaganda-style effects, and innovatively elaborates three psychological mechanisms that are invoked in the persuasion process—compliance, identification, and internalization—that Kelman draws from his own research. These dynamics, although the precise vocabulary did not catch on, represent a prototype that would presage work in active audience theorizing.

The top article in the 1966–1970 segment is Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien’s (1970) inventive article on knowledge gaps (cited 197 times), which is itself the seminal cite for that theory (number 17 on our list). Tichenor et al. offer up a provocative hypothesis about educationally based differential attentiveness to media and put forward a set of methodological techniques for measuring beliefs with survey research data over time to test it. As Kuhn (1962) might assert, this introduction of a theoretically grounded puzzle connected to a methodology to “solve” the puzzle is the definition of how cumulative science works. Entman’s (1993) *Journal of Communication* article on framing effects is not the first to introduce the concept but critiques and builds on the paradigm. It is the most frequently cited article in the 1991–1995 interval and is cited 281 times during the period of our analysis. The top article in the final segment 2001–2005 is the 2001 *Communication Research* article by Shah, McLeod, and Yoon, cited 40 times, which conducts a secondary analysis



of several commercial surveys to assess the impact of print, broadcast, and Internet exposure on political engagement. It is original empirical research that bridges the differential media exposure theory (systematically comparing self-reports on media use with levels of knowledge and political opinions) with the evolving theories about new media, notably the Internet. It is a model of theoretically grounded integrative research. Most of the 200 articles in our data set cited two, or perhaps three, specifically named theories.<sup>5</sup> Shah et al. (2001) are the most expansive; they cite eight.

What the subsample allows us to examine, however, not otherwise available in the raw SSCI master data set, is the structure of cocitation. Are the six clusters of theories intellectually coherent? One principal empirical test here is to compare the average within-cluster pattern of cocitation with the average across-cluster cocitation (is an article in one cluster more likely to cite another theory from the same cluster than any other?).

The answer, as reported in Table 2, is yes, modestly so. We can see that some clusters are much more bibliometrically coherent than others. The interpretive effects cluster is the clearest case of internal coherence with dramatically higher average internal compared with external correlation coefficients. The societal and media theory cluster simply does not hang together—it is our conceptual grouping, and we will show shortly it has unique structural relationships with other clusters; but the scholarship included together here generally does not see itself as part of a whole. Critical scholars analyzing hegemonic structures are not particularly likely to cite McLuhan or his intellectual successors or to cite cultivation theory or vice versa. The other clusters show moderate coherence. The Shannon and Lasswell traditions overlap within the persuasion cluster, the others within that cluster appear not to. Within the active audience, there is evidence of clustering with the notable exception of the more psychologically oriented theories, such as attribution, cognitive dissonance, and the elaboration likelihood model. The weak patterning of clustering (with the exception of the interpretive effects cluster) is not surprising. Our argument has been that the intellectual linkages between these theoretical perspectives have only been fitfully acknowledged by the practitioners and largely missed by historians of the field.

A second test allows for a visual representation of where the theories cluster together in our conceptual groups. We created a plot, depicted in Figure 3, of a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), using Stata, in order to see which of the individual theories were cited in common.<sup>6</sup> MCA is an exploratory technique similar to a principal components factor analysis, but it allows for the analysis of multiple dichotomously coded variables. The plot shows which theories tend to co-occur; in other words, one theory appearing close to another in the figure indicates that the theories are often cited together. The plot in Figure 3 underscores the findings from Table 2. Together, the two dimensions explain the largest proportion of inertia, or variance in the 24 variables, which accounts for just under 40%. Reading Figure 3 from left to right, the theories making up the social context theory cluster together along the left-hand side of the *x*-axis; many of the theories making up the active audience theory cluster together in the upper-left quadrant above the social context

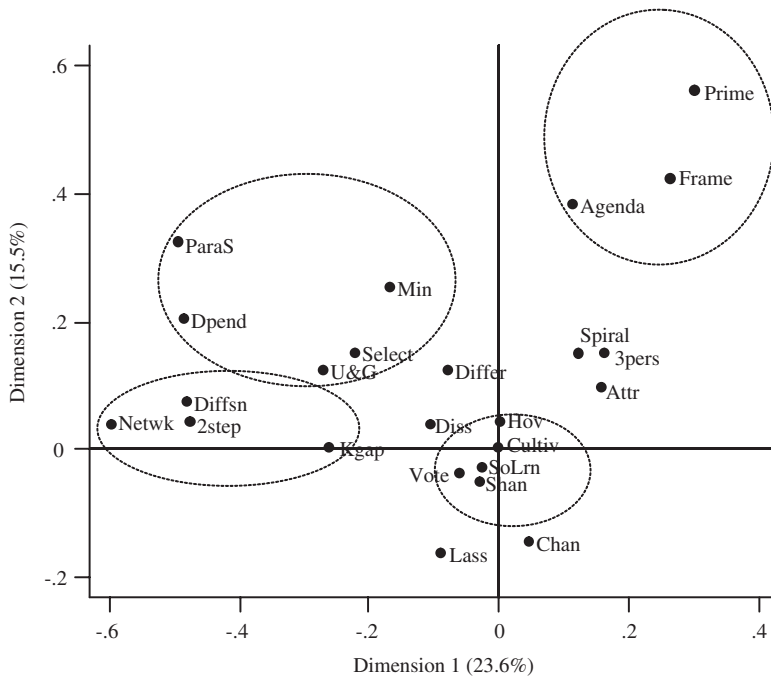


**Table 2** Patterns of Within-Cluster Cocitation

Theoretical Cluster	Average Internal	Average External	Media Effects Theory	Average Internal	Average External
	Correlation (Phi)	Correlation (Phi)		Correlation (Phi)	Correlation (Phi)
Persuasion Theories (1944–1963)	0.03	-0.01	1	-0.01	-0.02
			2	0.09	-0.01
			3	0.10	-0.02
			4	0.01	0.02
			5	-0.05	-0.01
Active Audience Theories (1944–1986)	0.04	0.01	6	-0.02	-0.01
			7	0.10	0.05
			8	0.07	0.01
			9	0.01	-0.02
			10	0.08	0.03
			11	0.07	0.01
			12	0.00	-0.01
			13	0.05	0.05
			14	-0.01	0.01
			15	0.15	0.02
Social Context Theories (1955–1983)	0.09	0.01	16	0.18	0.02
			17	0.06	0.00
			18	0.09	0.02
			19	0.05	0.00
			20	0.03	0.00

**Table 2** Continued

Theoretical Cluster	Average Internal Correlation	Average External Correlation	Media Effects Theory	Average Internal Correlation	Average External Correlation
	(Phi)	(Phi)		(Phi)	(Phi)
Societal and Media Theories (1933–1978)	0.02	0.02	21 Hegem/Public Sphere	0.02	0.03
			22 Channel Effects	0.00	0.01
			23 Differential Media Exp	0.05	0.02
			24 Social Cons Reality	0.01	0.04
			25 Cultivation Theory	0.01	-0.02
Interpretive Effects Theories (1972–1987)	0.40	0.00	26 Agenda Setting	0.36	0.01
			27 Priming	0.45	0.01
			28 Framing	0.40	-0.01
New Media Theories (1996–)	NA	NA	29 CMC	NA	NA

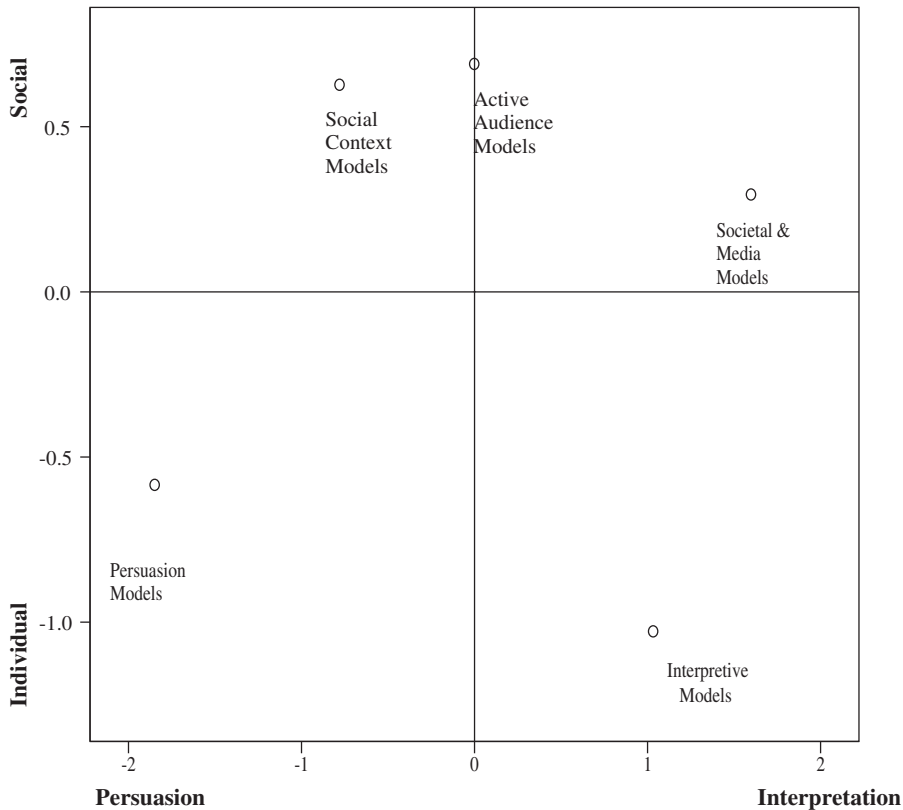


**Figure 3** Multiple correspondence analysis coordinate plot.  
*Note:* Coordinates are in principal normalization. Clusters are represented by dotted lines.

theories; several of the persuasion theories cluster together around the origin; and the three theories composing the interpretive effects model create a clear cluster in the upper-right quadrant. As in Table 2, the MCA plot does not produce a coherent cluster for the societal and media theories, again because articles utilizing these theories tend not to cite each other.

But what about the pattern of linkages between the hypothesized clusters themselves? Here, as depicted in Figure 4, is an intriguing surprise. We ran another series of clustering and plotting algorithms that display the labeled clusters in a two-dimensional space to graphically illustrate the relative strengths of association. In these plots, the closer two variables are to each other the more highly correlated they are, the more distant they are indicates statistical independence. We utilized the Euclidian Distance Modeling utility in SPSS, a variant of multidimensional scaling and smallest space analysis routines. Specifically, we used ALSCAL, first standardizing our variables using z-scores to prevent distortions, and then creating Euclidean distances for our measures of association.<sup>7</sup>

It became evident that the lack of correlation between the HCI literature and the others dominated the plotting with HCI in one corner and the others arrayed across the other corner. The new media theory literature, of course, is the most recent literature and because it did not exist for most of the 50-year period, it could not, by definition, have been cited by any of the earlier publications (and in turn, because it



**Figure 4** Theoretical traditions in communication effects research.

deals primarily with the mediation of interpersonal communication, it has not until recently cited the media effect literatures). So we set the new media cluster aside to examine the pattern of cocitation for the remaining five.

We puzzled over the resulting graphic a bit in hopes of interpreting the pattern and perhaps labeling the dimensions in theoretically meaningful terms. One possible interpretation, as our labeling suggests, is that those theories of a psychological bent that focus on the individual unit of analysis may help to explain the distance of the persuasion and interpretive clusters from the others—the vertical dimension. And, in turn, the horizontal dimension may reflect the emphasis on persuasion/attitude change as opposed to more recent emphasis on interpretation and cognitive structuring of message elements. The need for theoretical integration across natural tensions of these analytic dimensions is important, of course, but not exactly a new revelation. We recognized that McLeod and associates had been calling for just such an effort for several decades (McLeod, Kosicki, & Pan 1991; McLeod & Reeves, 1980). These scholars label the vertical dimension micro versus macro and the horizontal dimension attitudinal versus cognitive.

We also examined the methodologies used in each of the top-cited articles and will review that briefly here. We found no dramatic shifts in the dominant methodological approaches in use. Of the 200 articles, 15% of them were content analyses or employed content analyses to measure one or more variables, 43% were surveys, and 18% were experiments. The use of content analysis increased in the 1970s and 1980s, probably as a result of cultivation and agenda-setting studies, which are commonly cited from those periods. Surveys, while remaining the most common methodology cited, have declined slightly since the 1980s, while the number of experiments cited has increased over time.

Although 8% of the articles used time series data, only one article in our sample employed a time series design after the 1980s. Similarly, only 2.5% of the studies were panel designs and none appeared in the data set after the 1980s. Four percent used aggregate data, but almost no aggregate studies appeared after the 1970s. Factor analysis and related methods hit a peak in the early 1980s and have since declined and leveled off. On the other hand, the use of mediation, moderation, path analyses, and structural equation modeling increased over time, likely in part as a result of advances in computing and statistical design, but perhaps also owing to a post-Klapper interest in contingent and indirect effects and processes. Interestingly, none of the articles in the data set used hierarchical linear modeling. Finally, 30% of the articles were strictly theoretical pieces, literature overviews, and in more recent years, meta-analyses.

## Discussion

In a pensive mood, De Fleur (1998) looked over the corpus of communication research and concluded that there have been no significant new theories since the early 1980s and the golden age of communication research appears to have passed. We beg to differ. And we would like to suggest that novelty of theory unconnected to the evolving corpus of research may not be the best measure of theoretical progress.

Pondering the intellectual history of a field of scholarship from time to time is an important and constructive exercise. Scholarly disputes on where the field has come from and where it should be headed are a natural outcome of such activity. We have posited here that the widely utilized allegory of media effects scholarship that pivots back and forth between an interpretation of strong and minimal effects may function awkwardly as a significant impediment to the recognition of theoretical accumulation and the increasing sophistication of effects theories and the social contexts of the effects process. We put forward an alternative way to structure the field, suggesting that rather than rejecting previous theoretical structures or obsessing over a demonstration of a large effect size we simply focus on identifiable patterns of theoretical expansion and refinement. We find that effects theory evolves from a starting point of a simple model of persuasion and transmission (persuasion theories) and has accumulatively added in turn analytic constructs of audience motivation and disposition (active audience theories), the socially situated context of the mass communication process (social context theories), the character of the

technical channel of communication and the political and institutional context of communication (societal and media theories), and the impact of media messages on the salience and cognitive organization of opinions and beliefs (interpretive effects theories). Finally, a new and now fast-growing literature on the new media has emerged. This newest component of the literature has not yet made much of an effort to connect up with its forebears. Perhaps it should. We are delighted to see that the new work by Bennett and Iyengar (2008) proposes moving beyond the face-to-face versus mediated focus of CMC research in addressing the new media. They do not define the new media as a new field requiring theory *de novo*, but rather draw attention to how dramatically expanded choices facing media audiences force us to reconsider central premises of the extant media effects paradigm. Such an approach strikes us as important progress.

There is no figure in this article that cross-tabulates which elements of the three-stage model are equated to corresponding stages of the proposed six-stage model. The two approaches are complementary but incommensurate. The former draws attention to the characteristic size of effects, the latter to the conditions under which effects are evident. The three-stage model, as typically advocated, however, implies that the succeeding stages reject the premises of their predecessors. The evidence from our analysis, in contrast, illustrates that five of the six stages in the literature we identify not only continue to be cited, the pattern of citations continues to grow as models of media effects are built upon and refined rather than abandoned. And, for the record, in the sixth case concerning the early persuasion literature the number of citations continues to be strong and the relative decline in citations is rather modest.

Any typology that structures and labels elements of a complex scholarly literature is subject to some inevitable arbitrariness. We readily acknowledge that other organizational structures may be of equal validity and perhaps greater intellectual provocation and productivity and would welcome them. A selection of other publications or another operationalization of intellectual linkage might have revealed dramatically different patterns. But we believe a case can be made that there is value in self-consciously examining the process of theoretical accumulation and moving beyond the seductive siren call of pronouncements about how not-so-minimal media effects really are.

## Notes

- 1 This typology evolved from a collaborative process of the authors reading and discussing the sample of 200 most frequently cited articles in search of common problematics and thematics. It was basically an iterative process of clustering and reclustered and then labeling similar papers and then seeking out common theoretically seminal citations. Having derived the basic typology, we discovered that it looked strikingly similar to several others in the literature as noted, which we took to be a good sign. Accordingly, we stake no claim to originality or exclusivity. An entirely different way of clustering this literature could be of value and provide other insights into the character of theoretical aggregation and various impediments to aggregation. We hasten to draw readers'

attention to limitations of any single empirical exercise, such as this one. We are constrained by the time period of available data, the limited subsample of journals in the field, the absence of an analysis of lesser-cited articles, the limited sample of “seminal” studies, and possible errors in ISI data and data processing (particularly because of typographical errors). Any typology is subject to criticism. For example, we have grouped cognitive dissonance and social identity literatures together in the active audience category because they both represent forms of “motivated attention.” Audience members selectively attend to sources that are like them (identity theory) and are likely to agree with them (cognitive dissonance.) Reviewers have correctly pointed out that the structure of cognitive dissonance and identity theory are quite different. Had they been exemplified separately, however, it would not have significantly changed the analysis. Reviewers have also pointed out that many scholars consider ELM to be a classic example of a persuasion theory and should be more appropriately listed under that heading. However, unlike the characteristic research paradigm of the early persuasion research, which emphasized an undifferentiated audience and paid little attention to the cognitive dynamics of selective attention and deliberation, the ELM model introduces the concept of the thoughtful/evaluative “central route” (i.e., active audience) as opposed to the unthinking “peripheral route.” We include it under the active audience heading because the emphasis on elaboration is just the kind of active cognitive behavior and motivated attention that defines the cluster.

- 2 Intercoder reliability was assessed for Krippendorff's  $\alpha$  for each of the 29 theories at the explicit citation (1), reference (2), and implicit (indication of the theory) (3) levels. For each of the variables,  $\alpha$  was determined with SPSS following Hayes and Krippendorff (2007). The mean of the  $\alpha$  values for set 1 is  $M = .79$ ,  $SD = .28$ , set 2 is  $M = .22$ ,  $SD = .29$ , and set 3 is  $M = .17$ ,  $SD = .27$ . Because the  $\alpha$  values for set 3 are low, we did not include them in the analysis; however, we combined sets 1 and 2 together because the presence of a theory in our sample was frequently low, and recalculated the  $\alpha$  values. This resulted in  $M = .74$  and  $SD = .31$ . Using a .75 cutoff for reliability, the following variables produced reliable coding: dependency theory, two-step flow, diffusion, knowledge gap, spiral-of-silence, third person, social networks, channel effects, cultivation, agenda setting, and computer-mediated communication.
- 3 A content analysis of qualitative literature is currently underway using a sample of the top 20 most frequently cited articles from three of the top mass communication journals in the critical and qualitative tradition: *Media Culture & Society*, *Cultural Studies*, and *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. These journals are relatively new (the earliest beginning in 1980), so the sampling technique involved selecting the top 20 most frequently cited articles, for a total of 60 articles. The coding scheme was developed by looking at several textbooks and syllabi for the most important theoretical traditions in the field (e.g., public sphere theory, hegemony, etc.) and then developing a list of seminal citations by both referring to textbooks and iteratively looking for the most frequent citations within the sample itself.
- 4 A full table of the 200 articles and their frequencies of citation is available at [wrneuman.com](http://wrneuman.com). The 200-article subsample is not used in the discussion and illustration of the Matthew Effect because as a slice of the very top of the citation concentration curve, it contributes very little to our understanding of the character of the full distribution of citations.



- 5 Twenty-three articles were coded as citing none of the 29 theories. We looked more closely at these articles to see why. Three main reasons they did not fall into the coding scheme became evident: First, some of the articles fell into different fields or utilized theories from fields other than communications; second, several of the articles were based on other types of communication that did not fall within the purview of the study, such as interpersonal or organizational communication; third, a few of the articles were descriptive in nature and did not employ any of the theories in our coding scheme. More specifically, 10 articles were related to other fields, mostly political science and social psychology, 9 articles were other types of communication, and 4 articles were descriptive. An example of the latter is an article by Tankard and Ryan (1974), which involved interviewing scientists for the accuracy of science stories in the news.
- 6 Four of the theories (disposition theory, hegemony, social construction of reality, and ELM) were dropped at the outset because they rarely appeared in the data set, therefore having very low variance. HCI was also dropped, in keeping with the other analyses.
- 7 We saw excellent fit measures, based on Kruskal's stress (formula 1) and  $R^2$ ; however, the fit measures were probably inflated (i.e., low stress and high  $R^2$ ) because, with five variables, there were few variables in relation to the two dimensions. On the other hand, achieving appropriate results only requires more variables than dimensions, a criterion our analysis met, and thus we have confidence in our solution, despite lacking fit measures.

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L'évolution de la théorie des effets des médias : un modèle à six étapes de la recherche cumulative

### Résumé

La littérature sur les effets des médias est souvent dépeinte comme une progression en trois temps : une adhésion initiale à une conception invoquant des effets puissants, suivie d'un rejet des premiers travaux remplacés par un nouveau modèle d'effets infimes, suivi d'un second rejet et d'une redécouverte de puissants effets. Nous affirmons que si cette simplification dramatique (et plutôt romantique) peut être utile pédagogiquement dans les cours d'initiation, elle peut devenir un obstacle important aux affinements théoriques et au progrès dans la recherche plus poussée. Nous analysons les tendances de citation de 20 736 articles scientifiques de cinq revues de communication en portant une attention particulière aux 200 articles les plus fréquemment cités dans un effort de fournir un autre modèle en six étapes des théories cumulatives des effets médiatiques pour la période allant de 1965 à 2005.



## **Die Entwicklung der Medienwirkungstheorie: Ein-Sechs-Phasen-Modell kumulativer Forschung**

**Die Literatur zu Medienwirkungen wird häufig als ein Ablauf in drei Phasen dargestellt: beginnend mit einer Theorie der starken Wirkungen, gefolgt von der Ablehnung dieser früheren Arbeiten und einem neuen Modell der schwachen Wirkungen, welches wiederum abgelöst wurde von den wiederentdeckten starken Wirkungen. Wir argumentieren, dass diese dramatische und irgendwie romantische Vereinfachung sicherlich für Einführungskurse pädagogisch brauchbar ist, sie aber gleichzeitig ein wesentliches Hindernis für die Theorieentwicklung und den wissenschaftlichen Fortschritt darstellt. Wir analysieren die Quellenverweise in 20.736 wissenschaftlichen Artikeln in fünf kommunikationswissenschaftlichen Fachzeitschriften mit besonderem Augenmerk auf die 200 meistzitierten Artikel mit dem Ziel, ein alternatives Sechs-Phasen-Modell, der, wie wir sie nennen, kumulativen Medienwirkungstheorien für den Zeitraum zwischen 1956-2005 vorzulegen.**

## 미디어 효과 이론의 진화: 연구의 여섯단계 모델

### 요약

미디어 효과에 관한 문헌은 종종 세단계 과정으로 특정지어진다. 우선 이전 연구에 대한 논박을 수반하는 강한 효과 이론의 수용, 또 다른 논박을 수반하는 최소 효과의 새로운 이론, 그리고 강한 효과들의 재발견이 그들이다. 우리는 이러한 드라마적이고 일정정도 낭만적인 단순화가 기초 교과과정내에서 학문적으로 유용할 지 몰라도 그것은 고급수준의 학문에서는 더욱 확대된 이론적 정제와 과정에 주요한 해가 될지도 모른다는 것을 주장한다. 우리는 축적미디어효과이론의 여섯단계모델을 제공하기 위하여 지난 1956년부터 2005년 기간동안, 다섯개의 커뮤니케이션 저널에 발표된 20,736건의 학문적 저널의 인용 형태를 연구하였는데, 특히 가장 많이 인용된 200개의 논문을 강조하는 것에 의해 이를 실행하였다.

## La Evolución de la Teoría de los Efectos los Medios: Un Modelo de Investigación Cumulativa de Seis Etapas

### Resumen

La literatura de los efectos de los medios es frecuentemente caracterizada como una progresión de tres etapas inicialmente abarcando una teoría de los efectos fuertes seguida por un repudio hacia los trabajos anteriores y un nuevo modelo de los efectos mínimos seguido por otro rechazo y un redescubrimiento de los efectos fuertes.

Argüimos que aunque esta dramática y de algún modo romántica simplificación puede ser pedagógicamente útil en los cursos introductorios, puede probar ser un impedimento significativo para avanzar el refinamiento teórico y el progreso en el avance de la erudición. Analizamos las pautas de citaciones de 20.736 artículos de eruditos en cinco publicaciones de comunicación, con especial atención a los 200 manuscritos más frecuentemente citados, en un esfuerzo para proveer de un modelo alternativo cumulativo de los efectos de los medios de 6 etapas para el período 1956 - 2005.

## 媒介效果理论的演变：累积研究的六阶段模型

### 【摘要：】

媒介效应的文献往往以三个阶段的发展所界定：一是早期学者所拥护的强大媒介效应理论学说，接下来学界对早期文献进行批判并提出了有限媒介效应的新模式，继而是新一轮的批判和强大媒介效应论的回光返照。我们认为虽然这种戏剧化，稍带浪漫的对媒介效应发展进程的简化可能在入门课程教学上适用，但是它可能成为进一步完善和发展学术理论的重大障碍。作者对五个传播学期刊中的 20,736 篇学术论文，尤其是引用率最高的 200 篇论文进行分析，并提出 1956 年-2005 年期间的媒介效应理论的六阶段模型。