Media Influence as Persuasion

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For almost a century, mass communication researchers have wrestled with questions of how, why, when, and where media produce effects. These issues, which span a broad range of areas including health communication, political communication, and commercial advertising, can all be viewed as questions of persuasion. Lasswell's (1927) own early studies of media focused on "the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols" (p. 627). This description coincides with Dillard's (2010) more recent definition of persuasion as the following: "the use of symbols (sometimes accompanied by images) by one social actor for the purpose of changing or maintaining another social actor's opinion or behavior" (p. 203). The two traditions of research, one on media and one on persuasion, focus on many of the same questions and underlying processes.

The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate those similarities as well as highlight points of potential synergy between the two. Our argument for the study of media influence as persuasion unfolds in two stages. First, we offer a systematic overview of a series of empirical studies that focus on (1) media and (2) the generation of persuasion-based outcomes. To structure this review, we juxtapose two classic persuasion typologies, then locate instances of media research in each resulting cell. Second, we provide an overview of how a handful of mass communication's most frequently utilized theories can be viewed as frameworks for the study of persuasion processes and outcomes. The various elements of this chapter stem from a single overarching argument that the study of media effects has always been linked to assessments of persuasion. This realization can provide tangible benefits for how the field approaches future studies of media influence, and these benefits are outlined in the closing portions of this chapter. The study of media influence is multifaceted and difficult to grasp as a single entity (see Nabi & Oliver, 2009). However, linking the study of media influence with persuasion allows for connections to be made between seemingly disparate lines of research in a manner that allows for the field's empirical work to be "interpretable, cumulative, and socially significant" (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008, p. 709).

A Typology of Persuasion and Media Influence

There are several different ways to approach developing more formal linkages between media effects and persuasion. One possibility would be to utilize a single persuasion theory (e.g., cognitive dissonance theory, social judgment theory, elaboration likelihood model) and describe any one study of media influence through this particular theoretical lens. However, the use of a lone theory would be far too limiting when attempting to explain all that comprises the study of media effects research. No one theory of persuasion can serve as a grand theory of media influence. Instead, it is essential to step back from a theory-specific approach and focus on two broader aims: properly bounding persuasion and acknowledging the inherent complexity of producing a media effect. We turn to the work of Miller (1980/2002) to address the bounds of persuasion and to McGuire (1989) for how best to approach media influence.

Miller (1980/2002) stresses that persuasion encompasses three different processes: Response shaping, response reinforcement, and response change. *Response shaping* focuses on the initial formation of how someone reacts to an object, while *response reinforcement* speaks to a strengthening of a preexisting reaction toward an object (this type of response is not purely evaluative and can include generating resistance to influence as well; Szabo & Pfau, 2002). *Response change* in its purest form is identified as a shift in the valence (positive/negative) of someone's reaction to an object. Discussions of media effects in relation to persuasion often form around an artificial boundary constraint of defining persuasion as being about response change only (Chaffee & Hochheimer, 1985; Holbert, Garrett, & Gleason, 2010). Defining persuasion as being about response change only represents a disservice to the concept. Any discussion of media effects that focuses solely on response change implicitly adopts a limited effects paradigm (see Bennett &

Iyengar, 2008). But, when persuasion is seen also to include response shaping and response reinforcement, it becomes clear that media influence and all its complexities can be understood as persuasion.

In addition, any discussion of mass communication influence must take into account the full range of factors that are at work in the production of a media effect. McGuire (1989) argues that five factors play a role in the production of a media effect: Message, source, recipient, channel, and context. It is easy to fall prey to focusing only on message influence in relation to persuasion, but media effects scholarship examines much more than just this single communication input. Any one media message functions alongside the source of that message, a broad range of recipient characteristics (e.g., demographics, needs, traits), the context within which the message is provided, and the channel through which it is offered (e.g., television, radio, newspaper) in the production of an effect. All five communication inputs are necessary for a thorough account.

We developed a 15-part typology to show that all varieties of persuasion in relation to the communication input variables of message, source, recipient, channel, and context are evident in the mass communication literature. The 3×5 typology focuses on (1) Miller's original conceptualization of persuasion as being about the shaping, reinforcing and/or changing of responses to attitude objects and (2) McGuire's (1989) five communication inputs. In offering this organizational structure, we strive to present a systematic assessment of the state of existing media research in relation to persuasion so that readers can better envision how seemingly distinct pieces of media effects scholarship form a more coherent whole.

Peer-reviewed journal articles were selected to represent each of the 15 areas of the typology (see Table 3.1). The study of media can be thought of as a broad tent, one that is large enough to cover both media and persuasion. Subsequent chapters of this handbook deal with political campaigns

(see chapter 16 in this volume), health campaigns (see see chapter 17 in this volume), advertising (see see chapter 19 in this volume), and entertainment-oriented messages (i.e., narrative; see chapter 13 in this volume). It is appropriate to discuss these areas of study in persuasion terms, and so too is it proper to state that these areas are resolutely focused on the study of media influence. As a result, we have sought to represent of all of these media research areas within our typology, extracting works from outlets that typically publish pieces in the areas of commercial strategic communication, health communication, and political communication, as well as more general works in mass communication.

The presentation of the typology will focus on the five communication inputs in the following order: source, message, channel, recipient, and context. The presentation of Miller's three categories of persuasion is nested within each communication input and offered in the following order: formation, reinforcement, and change. We focus on only those works published since 2000 in order to show that the mix of Miller's and

McGuire's works remains a vibrant part of current mass communication research. But, it is important to note that there are numerous examples of works from earlier decades that could be slotted into any area of the typology.

Source

Formation

Karmarkar and Tormala (2010) examined attitude formation by asking participants to read a review of a fictional Italian restaurant, which was attributed to an expert source versus a source with markedly lower expertise. The source either expressed certainty or uncertainty in the review. The researchers demonstrated that both source expertise and source certainty significantly and directly impacted participants' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the fictional restaurant. Additionally, readers formed the most favorable attitudes when the low-expertise source expressed a great deal of certainty, and when the high-expertise source expressed uncertainty.

Table 3.1 Miller-by-McGuire Typology

	Formation	**Reinforcement**	**Change**
Source	Karmarker & Tormala, 2010, *Journal of Consumer Research*	Gunther & Liebhart, 2006, *Journal of Communication*	Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Lee, 2006, *Political Psychology*
Message	Putrevu, 2010, *Journal of Advertising*	Barker & Knight, 2000, *Public Opinion Quarterly*	Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006, *Journal of Communication*
Channel	Sundar, 2000, *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*	Pfau, Holbert, Zubric, Pasha, & Lin, 2000, *Media Psychology*	Overby & Barth, 2009, *Mass Communication and Society*
Recipient	Stephenson & Palmgreen, 2001, *Communication Monographs*	Holbert & Hansen, 2006, *Human Communication Research*	Chang, 2009, *Health Communication*
Context	Lee, Scheufele, & Lowenstein, 2005, *Science Communication*	Nathanson, 2001, *Communication Research*	McCluskey, Stein, Boyle, & McLeod, 2009, *Mass Communication and Society*

Subjects had no prior attitudes toward the attitude object (i.e., the restaurant). As a result, this media effect derived from a source manipulation reflects response formation.

Reinforcement

The hostile media phenomenon is a tendency for strong partisans on either side of an issue to view relatively balanced news coverage as biased *against* their point of view (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). In studying this type of media effect, Gunther and Liebhart (2006) presented the same message to all participants, but manipulated the attribution of the message to either a professional journalist or a college student. When the article was attributed to a journalist, partisans on both sides perceived the article as strongly biased toward the other side. This divergent outcome derived from this source manipulation is an example of how a specific act of media engagement can produce a reinforcement of one's responses toward specific attitude objects. Partisans reinforced their own positions by distancing themselves from a news piece written by the journalist as source in particular.

Change

Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, and Yee (2006) focused their attention on digital transformations of facial similarity between politicians and potential voters. The ratio of candidate-to-voter facial image meshing was varied between conditions (low similarity, 100% candidate facial image; high similarity, 60% candidate/40% voter). This study focused on only a male candidate, but a mix of male and female respondents. The increased morphing of the male political candidate with male voter facial images resulted in male subjects responding more favorably to the political candidate, as measured by a feeling thermometer, attractiveness, and voting intention. However, females went from ranking the political candidate relatively high on all three of these categories when similarity was low (i.e.,

male candidate's image was not morphed) to responding to the candidate much more unfavorably in the high candidate-voter morphing condition. Males shifted upward in their response toward the political candidate as a result of enhanced candidate-voter facial morphing, while females moved in the opposite direction. This study reveals how the manipulation of a single source element (i.e., facial similarity) can generate opposing response change reactions in audience members.

Message

Formation

Putrevu (2010) conducted a series of experiments examining the effects of advertising style on attitude formation. The experiments looked at the attitudes that participants formed toward a fictional airline, attitudes toward the advertisements, and behavioral intentions. The baseline persuasion message was manipulated to create four versions: an attribute-framed message and a goal-framed message, with positive and negative versions of each. The study found that when the advertisement used an attribute-framed approach, the positive message led to significantly more positive attitudes toward the brand. However, when a goal-framed message was used, the negative version of the message was more effective than the positive one.

Reinforcement

Barker and Knight (2000) looked at the effects of political talk radio on listener attitudes. Using an analysis of topics that were frequently mentioned on Rush Limbaugh's radio show and cross-sectional survey data from the 1995 American National Election Survey, Barker and Knight found that even after controlling for a host of demographic and prior ideology variables, the frequency that topics were mentioned on Limbaugh's show predicted stronger listener agreement with Limbaugh on those topics. The researchers found that

listening to this content led to significantly more conservative attitudes beyond any overall shifts in opinion in the general public, particularly for topics that were discussed frequently via this outlet. These effects reflect how media messages can generate response reinforcement.

Change

Slater, Rouner, and Long (2006) studied the influence of two television dramas on viewer attitudes. The topics of the television narratives were two controversial and well-known public issues: the death penalty and the legal rights of same-sex couples. With regards to the same-sex drama, viewers' post-viewing attitudes did not differ significantly from the control group, but for the episode regarding the death penalty, post-viewing attitude measures indicated that the television show did in fact lead to attitude change (i.e., more favorable views of the death penalty). The death penalty drama also led to increased behavioral intentions to support the death penalty, and appeared to achieve these effects by weakening the link between prior ideology and subsequent attitudes toward the death penalty. The fact that the death penalty drama led to significant attitude shift demonstrates that in some cases narrative messages can be effective persuasive devices in producing response change (see chapter 13 by Busselle and Bilandzic in this volume).

Channel

Formation

Sundar (2000) manipulated the format in which news content was presented on a website in order to gauge the impact of various channels of information delivery on memory and attitudes toward the news stories. Participants saw one of five possible versions of a news website: text only, text stories with pictures, text stories with audio, text stories with pictures and audio, or text stories with pictures, audio, and video.

Attitudes toward the website (evaluations of design and coherence) were significantly lower when the stories were presented with text, pictures, and audio together. Evaluations of the website were most favorable in the "text with pictures" condition and the "text with pictures, audio, and video" condition. With regard to news quality, attitudes were the most favorable in the text with pictures condition, and were the least favorable in the conditions with more channels: "text with pictures and audio" and "text with pictures, audio, and video." Thus, there was a clear influence of the mix of channel presentation on a range of attitude objects with which the subjects had no prior interaction (e.g., news website, specific articles).

Reinforcement

Pfau, Holbert, Zubric, Pasha, and Lin (2000) focused their research on the influence of channel (print versus video) on the ability to confer *resistance* to unwanted persuasion (i.e., inoculation). This study found a direct and statistically significant effect of the channel manipulation on post-inoculation stimulus attitudes. As stated by Pfau et al., "compared to print, video inoculation treatments elicited an immediate impact, triggering resistance to attitudes at Phase 2" (2000, p. 23). Those subjects who held a specific attitude toward the topic of the message were better able to maintain that attitude at Time 2 as a result of coming into contact with the inoculation message via video rather than via a purely text-based message. There was a greater likelihood of being able to generate a reinforcement of a preexisting attitude through the use of video than through the use of text only. As a result, channel had a direct effect on response reinforcement.

Change

Overby and Barth (2009) used data from a three-wave panel survey of voters in Arkansas and Missouri to analyze political behavior concerning

U.S. Senate races. The researchers were examining the phenomenon known as "media malaise," which posits that a large amount of exposure to political ads, particularly negative ads, can lead to negative attitudes toward the American political system. The researchers found that, even after controlling for prior attitudes, radio and television had significant effects on attitudes toward our political system, but in different ways. Greater exposure to campaign ads on television led to significantly lower evaluations of the quality of election campaigns. Radio ad exposure and political e-mail exposure did not significantly affect evaluations of campaign quality. With regard to participant satisfaction with how democracy works in the United States, television and radio ads worked in opposite directions. Greater exposure to radio ads led to significantly *more favorable* evaluations of U.S. democracy, while greater exposure to TV ads led to significantly *less favorable* evaluations.

Recipient

Formation

Mass media scholars often focus their attention on how various individual-difference variables serve to form a response to a persuasive message as an object, and how then reactions to the message itself (e.g., perceived liking) generates a persuasive outcome (e.g., Nan, 2008). Stephenson and Palmgreen (2001) revealed that those individuals who were identified as high sensation seekers[1] had an automatic and positive response to antidrug public service media messages that were classified as being high in sensation value (e.g., quick cuts, strobe lighting, deep base beats). The recipient characteristic of sensation seeking influenced how certain audience members responded to the antidrug messages. The Stephenson and Palmgreen (2001) study is an example of how an individual-difference recipient characteristic allows for the formation of a response to a specific message,

and the indirect effects of the individual-difference variable on traditional persuasion outcomes are generated through reactions to the message itself as an object.

Reinforcement

Holbert and Hansen (2006) conducted a study on affective ambivalence (i.e., the internal consistency of affective responses to then-President George W. Bush) in reaction to the viewing of the controversial Michael Moore film, *Fahrenheit 9-11*. Subjects were randomly placed into either the stimulus condition (i.e., viewing the film in its entirety) or the control condition (i.e., no media material offered). These researchers reported a statistically significant two-way interaction of message condition (film, no film) by political party identification (Democrat, Republican, Independent), with a steep reduction in affective ambivalence toward President Bush for Democrats who viewed the film. Democrats already possessed relatively low levels of affective ambivalence toward Bush as attitude object prior to viewing the film, but this group developed even more internally consistent affective reactions toward Bush after having viewed the film (as hypothesized). The role of political party identification as a receiver characteristic played a key role in creating response reinforcement (i.e., increase in internal consistency of affective responses) to an attitude object through media exposure.

Change

Chang (2009) conducted an experiment examining attitudes toward smoking among high school students in Taiwan. Participants were asked to read print advertisements containing antismoking messages that focused on either the health impacts or psychological motives (e.g., tension relief) for smoking. The researcher found that among participants who were smokers, the health-oriented messages led to attitude change,

reducing positive attitudes towards smoking, while motives-oriented based messages were less effective. Surprisingly, for nonsmokers, the motives-oriented messages had a boomerang effect and actually led to more positive attitudes toward smoking. Thus, the recipient characteristic of being a smoker or nonsmoker impacted the outcome of attitude change.

Context

Formation

The area of science communication is on the rise (e.g., Nisbet & Scheufele, 2009). There is much discussion in this area concerning a general "deficit model" when it comes to reaching out to a public to discuss science issues (see Sturgis & Allum, 2004). The general public has little to no awareness, knowledge, or attitude toward a wide variety of science-related matters, and many of these topics are exceedingly complex and often involve long-term, indirect outcomes that are not tangible for those with little understanding. One contextual factor often focused on in this line of research is "opinion climate"—one element of opinion climate would be a general trust in science. Generalized trust levels in science and scientists influence more specific attitudes toward new science issues (e.g., biotechnology) brought to public light through media (Priest, Bonfadelli, & Rusanen, 2003). Lee, Scheufele, and Lewenstein (2005) found the contextual factor of opinion climate (e.g., trust in business leaders) to affect the formation of public attitudes toward the risks associated with specific and emerging science-related issues (e.g., nanotechnology). The general public at large had no well-defined attitudes toward these science-related issues (i.e., reflective of the deficit model). However, when presented with these issues (most often times through news reports), initial attitudes were shaped by the macrolevel contextual factors of trust in science and actors (e.g., scientists, business leaders) who are influential in how these science- or science

technology–related matters play themselves out in the public arena.

Reinforcement

The context in which children watch television (e.g., alone or with others) can have a significant impact on their interpretations of television content and its subsequent impact. Nathanson (2001) found that the children in her sample watched violent and aggressive content far more with peers than with parents, and that rates of peer coviewing and peer discussion of this type of content were strongly correlated with positive attitudes and greater acceptance of this content. It has clearly been shown that those who are already aggressive gravitate toward aggressive content (Bandura, 1986), and the work of Nathanson indicates that the contextual factor of viewing aggressive content with one's peers will serve to reinforce positive attitudes toward this content.

Change

Classic media research on the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis is another area of mass communication research that takes into account context (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). For instance, communities that are more diverse tend to allow for more positive presentations of social protest given the wider variance of opinion at the macrosocial level, while communities that are less pluralistic will be less receptive to social protests taking place within their limited geographic area. This lower level of palatability will be reflected in more negative news coverage of social protests in these communities as well. A recent study by McCluskey, Stein, Boyle, and McLeod (2009) found that newspapers in less pluralistic communities (1) provided less coverage of protests and (2) covered protests in ways that were more critical of those social movements. This was especially true when the social protests were directed at local government. It is

clear though various experimental works that varied news coverage of social protests can produce response change in how media audience members view not only the protesters and the stances they are taking on various issues, but also the police who are responding to/seeking to control the movements (see McLeod, 1995; McLeod & Detenber, 1999). However, a broader point being made by this area of research is that these types of response change outcomes will only become evident in communities that are pluralistic.

Summary

The studies summarized represent how the study of mass communication influence, undertaken across a wide range of subfields, can be linked to a full range of persuasion outcomes. We have offered a series of works that deal with response formation, reinforcement, and change. In addition, it was revealed through these works that persuasion in its many facets has been addressed by mass communication scholarship. As a result, there is a clear case to be made that the study of media influence is well matched with the study of persuasion.

Persuasion Components in Mass Communication Theories

The previous section provided a systematic overview of individual empirical works across a wide range of mass communication-related areas that demonstrate media effects as persuasion. However, the treatment of the study of media as being in line with the study of persuasion can and should be addressed at a broader theoretical level as well. Bryant and Miron (2004) cast a wide net in terms of what they included as mass communication *theory* when providing an overview of the current state of theory building in the field. They identified 26 major media-oriented theories that were referenced across a sample of journals

affiliated with distinct national/international scholarly associations. A handful clearly rise above the others in terms of the frequency with which they are referenced: agenda setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), cultivation (e.g., Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980), social learning (e.g., Bandura, 1973), McLuhan's study of media form influence (e.g., McLuhan, 1964), and the diffusion of innovations (e.g., Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). As we demonstrate, there are processes of influence within each of these theories that are representative of our understanding of persuasion.

Agenda Setting

Agenda setting as a theory of news media influence represented a shift away from the more marketing-oriented model of campaign influence that was a driving force behind the work of Lazarsfeld and colleagues (e.g., Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). McCombs and Shaw (1972) steered the attention of political communication scholarship away from the latter stages of the hierarchy of effects (i.e., attitudes and behaviors) and the high bar of defining only "change" (i.e., Miller's response change as defined as a shift in valence) as an "effect." Instead, an argument was put forward by McCombs and Shaw, and backed by strong empirical evidence, that media can have strong influence on the earlier stages of the hierarchy of effects (i.e., awareness and salience).

Intricately connected to the process of salience transfer (from the media to the public) detailed in agenda setting theory is the subsequent process of political media priming effects (see McCombs, 2004).[2] This transfer effect has been studied at both the individual and aggregate levels (see Acapulco typology; McCombs et al., 2011). Priming is first and foremost about evaluation—what objects do people focus on when evaluating political actors and/or where they stand on particular issues? (see Scheufele, 2000). The process of salience transfer that is at the heart of agenda setting establishes the specific elements deemed

to be most important within the public. If news media outlets are constantly talking about the state of the economy and jobs, then the public will be thinking about the state of the economy and jobs. In terms of priming, it would then be the case that the economy and job creation would be salient in people's minds when they are asked to evaluate how well President Obama is doing as President of the United States (e.g., stating their attitude toward Obama on a public opinion survey). The issues of the economy and job creation, as a result of being placed prominently within the news media's agenda, will be used disproportionately by citizens when it comes time to judge President Obama's job performance.

It is clear from this summary of the processes of influence detailed in agenda setting and priming that a process of persuasion unfolds, leading up to citizens forming attitudes and opinions toward political actors. The notion of treating agenda setting theory as detailing a process of persuasion is legitimized further when expanding our discussion to include not just the first level of agenda setting (i.e., salience transfer of *objects*), but also the second level of agenda setting theory (i.e., salience transfer of *attributes*; see Ghanem, 1997). Returning to the example of President Obama, specific attributes that are constantly raised in news media about our current president include his racial/ethnic profile, his being an intellectual, a family man, and the sense of calm/reason he brings to most decision-making functions. All of these attributes, made salient through the 24-7 news cycle, work to aid in the shaping of our attitudes toward our current president and whether we plan to vote for him in the 2012 general presidential election. As a result, the salience transfer process outlined in agenda setting theory can and should be viewed as part of broader persuasive processes evident in media.

Cultivation

Gerbner's cultivation theory reinforced the notion that media had the potential to produce moderate to large effects on individuals and society, especially over the long term (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Cultivation researchers argue that television, in particular, "cultivate[s] stable and common conceptions of reality" and it does so because "viewers are born into [a] symbolic world and cannot avoid exposure to its recurrent patterns" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002, p. 45). The "symbolic world" of television presents society in a manner that does not match reality. Our constant contact with televised messages shapes how we come to see the role of violence in a social world (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976), determines specific sex roles (e.g., Signorielli, 1989), and establishes our views on the environment (e.g., Shanahan & McComas, 1999). The symbolic world offered by television stems from the industrialized mass production of messages by the few for consumption by the many, and the basic influences described by Gerbner and colleagues can very much be seen as a parallel to Miller's basic notion of response-shaping persuasion effects. Television through a process defined as "mainstreaming" leads individuals to react in similar ways to objects in the real world based on how the world is presented to us through television as a storyteller.

Cultivation as a theory of media influence also includes discussion of what can best be defined as response-reinforcement processes. A key process described by cultivation scholarship is "mainstreaming" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). Mainstreaming is defined by Gerbner et al. (2002) as a process by which media generates "a relative commonality of outlooks and values" through heavy exposure. The medium of television consistently offers a symbolic representation of the world that is violent, sexist, and lacking in a healthy respect for the environment (once again, to name just a few elements that have been explored extensively by cultivation scholars). The mainstreaming effect is a classic reinforcement effect—the consistency and universality of television's symbolic representation of the world creates macrosocial uniformity of worldviews by continually reinforcing mainstream views.

Finally, the cognitive processes undertaken by audience members that lead to cultivation outcomes further show that cultivation theory can be viewed as a persuasion theory. Shrum and colleagues (e.g., Shrum, 1995, 1996, 1997; Shrum & O'Guinn, 1993) argue that television's influence stems from the audience engaging the medium via traditional heuristic processing. If audience members were to engage in more effortful, systematic processing of television messages, then the social judgments that match the symbolic world of television would not be seen as strongly in audience members. Not only did Gerbner and the early cultivation scholars discuss the role of the systematic manipulation of symbols in the formation of audience attitudes, but they also described core processes of influence (e.g., mainstreaming) that match well with our basic conceptualizations of certain aspects of persuasion (e.g., response reinforcement). Furthermore, the basic cognitive processes underlying cultivation are direct parallels to the paths of influence that are central to persuasion theories such as the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and the heuristic-systematic model (HSM; cf., O'Keefe, chapter 9 of this volume). It is clear that much of what has been outlined to date in the area of cultivation research can be seen as describing persuasion-based processes and outcomes.

Social Learning

Of the five mass communication theories under consideration, the most explicitly persuasive in orientation is Bandura's social learning theory (see Bandura, 2001). The basic argument put forward by Bandura is that individuals are social learners: We learn how to act through our observations of others. Bandura (1986) details a four-stage process for how social learning unfolds over time. First, an individual pays attention to another person (either through unmediated or mediated contact). The second stage is defined as "retention processes," and one way in which

retention is enhanced is through repeated viewing of the behavior (Smith et al., 2006). Media, especially a visually oriented medium like television, allow for a tremendous amount of repeated viewing of specific acts, and in a manner that affords undivided attention to be given if the viewer chooses to do so. For example, a child may come into contact with a cartoon where one character acts out in an aggressive manner toward another character and is rewarded for these actions. The child is intrigued by the action-outcome pairing, pays more attention to this message, and consumes subsequent airings of the same program where similar cause-and-effect scenarios play themselves out in various storylines. This media example can be thought of as a classic response-shaping activity, and, as a result, producing a persuasive outcome.

It is important that the full social learning process does not end with the repeated viewing and retention. The latter two stages of social learning play themselves out in nonmediated environments. Third, there is the production process. The production processes involve guided enactment, the monitoring of social feedback of those enactments, and the manufacturing of creative adjustments to a modeled behavior to make it more appropriate for various situations. Finally, there are motivational processes, which involve the individual making determinations regarding the utility of adopting various modeled behaviors relative to the achievement of his or her goals. Those modeled behaviors that produce sufficient utility will be retained, while those that are unfruitful will be discarded. These nonmediated activities can produce response-change or response-reinforcement. If the actions learned through media, and being mimicked in real life, are producing positive outcomes, then the initial response shaping will be reinforced. If the actions taken on by the media audience member do not produce desirable outcomes, then the response is likely to change. In short, the first two stages of social learning theory speak to response-shaping processes, while the latter two stages detail how and why there can be response-reinforcement or

response-change. No matter what process of social learning unfolds, all of these activities are representative of persuasive acts that take shape over time and that were initiated by the consumption of media messages.

McLuhan

McLuhan's (1978) work is fixated most squarely on form/channel. McLuhan argued that "it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (McLuhan & Carson, 2003, pp. 230–231). By "association," McLuhan was speaking to the notion of what concepts we link together in our minds to form meaning (akin to associative networks in the mind), and by "action" he was speaking of the human behaviors generated by the associative networks. So, McLuhan was focused most squarely on that area of the hierarchy of effects where persuasion scholars often reside (i.e., attitudes and behaviors). It is clear that McLuhan did not believe in the notion of "media effects" as short-term, direct outcomes of media content consumption. Nonetheless, there are clear empirical principles and value that can be extracted from his work (see Holbert, 2004).

Meyrowitz (1998) describes three classifications of media research: media as conduit, media as language, and media as environment. Media-as-environment scholars argue that each medium represents a unique way of viewing the world based on its inherent strengths and limitations. No one way of presenting the world is any better or worse, just different from other ways. A major area of study for this line of research is at the macrosocial level, which focuses on when there are shifts in dominant forms of communication within a culture. McLuhan's work, epitomized by classic adages like "the medium is the message," is representative of a media-as-environment approach to mass communication influence, and there is a clear case to be made that this take on the study of media can be viewed as the study of persuasion and persuasive outcomes.

Building on earlier work by Chesebro (1984) on media epistemologies, Chesebro and Bertelsen (1996) make an argument that "communication technologies invite responses, particularly critical evaluations of the symbols and cognitive systems human beings are to live with, by, and through on a daily basis" (p. 176). The classic study of persuasion focuses on someone's manipulation of symbols to shape the attitudes and behaviors of others, but what McLuhan, Meyrowitz, Chesebro, and other media-as-environment scholars emphasize is that media technologies establish boundaries within which human beings as communicators must function in their attempts to influence others. More specifically, the inherent characteristics of one medium relative to other media forms tend to lead to human beings forming specific patterns of responses to symbolic systems. This process is representative of the technological determinism that is pervasive in the work of McLuhan and others who share his perspectives on media influence (Carey, 1981). Regardless of your assessment of the validity of these claims, the argument being offered is that the form/channel of communication, in particular one medium of mass communication versus another, shapes how we approach and gain meaning of the symbols we come into contact with on a daily basis.

The theorizing of McLuhan at the more microlevels, in particular his discussion of the use of different senses in relation to different media, offers the best means by which to test form influence in an empirical manner (Holbert, 2004). McLuhan (1975) argued that there was an environmental residue to any piece of information that landed in the brain—all pieces of information that landed in the brain were tagged by the sense used to extract that piece of information from an environment we engaged (real or mediated). These sensory tags were one criterion by which various pieces of information could be linked in the mind. So, our mental models are constructed not just around symbolic meaning, but also retain an environmental residue of sensory input. The more we take in

pieces of information with similar tags (e.g., the sensorial tags associated with television as dominant medium of electronic age), the more humans would begin to see and interpret the world in line with what television offers us in terms of a unique environment and a symbolic manipulation of that environment. If such media-as-environment tags were to remain part of the information stored in our memories, then there would be a direct medium/channel influence that shapes how we approach various attitude objects, how our responses toward those objects are reinforced over time, and also when there would be any shifting/alteration in the valence of our responses to these objects.

Diffusion of Innovations

In making a case for diffusion of innovation theory as persuasion, it is important to first outline what can be defined as an innovation. An innovation can be just about anything that is perceived as new. This new object can be as tangible as a technological advancement or as abstract as a theory. As a result of the focus being on an innovation (i.e., that which is new), then it is most appropriate to approach this theory from the perspective of it describing response shaping activities. Of particular interest to the study of any innovation's diffusion is the S-curve (Rai, Ravichandran, & Samaddar, 1998), the pattern and rate by which any one innovation becomes diffuse within a society. The S-curves for some innovations have been rather steep, signaling a rather quick process by which the innovation made its way to the masses (e.g., the microwave). However, the diffusion of other innovations can be tracked along a curve that is much more horizontal (e.g., clothes washer). Why is it that some innovations become diffuse rather quickly, while others take longer to reach the late majority and laggard groups?

Rogers and colleagues identified a few characteristics that influence the speed and degree to which any one innovation becomes diffuse: Does the innovation represent a relative advantage (i.e., is it a better mouse trap)? Is the innovation compatible with existing lifestyles and worldviews? How simple is the innovation (i.e., tangible, easy to use, parsimonious)? Is there a trial period? How big are the risks (e.g., financial, social) associated with adoption? Are there directly observable results? (Pashupati & Kendrick, 2010). Innovations that enjoy a relative advantage, function in line with existing values, are simple to understand or use, allow for a trial period, are less risky, and have directly observable results are those that are adopted at a quicker pace. However, rarely does any single innovation retain all the qualities needed to ensure immediate adoption. In fact, it is often the case that an innovation ranks high on some of these criteria, but relatively low on others. This is where persuasive acts come into play in determining the nature of the S-curve. Any innovation is most likely competing with other innovations, and it is a competitive process by which one innovation attempts to become diffuse relative to competing products, ideas, or theories. It is within this competitive environment that communication becomes essential and persuasive outcomes are produced. Promoters of a given innovation will see to make salient specific attributes that would lead to higher levels of adoption in the shortest period of time, while opponents of the same innovation will emphasize those attributes that will stunt widespread adoption. It is important to remember that the diffusion of any innovation is a social effort and an outcome of many communicative acts that are competitive. This competitive communication process is reflective of persuasion.

Future Research

The study of media influence is complex and multifaceted. A broad array of theories have been put forward to detail certain aspects of how mass communication produces effects in a wide range of contexts (e.g., politics, health, advertising,

popular culture). It is often difficult, if not impossible, to gain a handle on how various empirical works on media effects, much less theoretically grounded lines of research, work together to form a coherent whole that would allow for media researchers to present to the broader public a concise summary of how, when, where, and why media have an impact on various aspects of their lives. In short, this field of study lacks organizational power. Diversity clearly has its strengths (Page, 2007), but the field would be well served to bring a broad range of research into a framework that forms a more coherent whole. This chapter has made an argument that linking the study of media effects to persuasion allows for greater organizational power to emerge. Additional theoretical argumentation should build off of the foundation offered in this work, focusing on how the broad principles of persuasion theory can serve as a means by which to bring together seemingly disparate areas of media research. There is a real need to establish a unified identity in the field of mass communication research, and persuasion may serve as a vehicle through which a shared identity for media effects research could be established.

At its most basic level, an endeavor of this kind would require researchers to properly define the scope of what can and should be labeled as a media effect. Adopting a properly bounded persuasion-oriented lens for the study of media influence (i.e., embracing the notion of an effect being representative of response formation, response reinforcement, and/or response change) would at the very least serve to guard against researchers falling into the trap of artificially constraining the concept of a "media effect" to being representative of change only (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Some theories of media influence are closely wedded to a media effects tradition, while other theorists (e.g., McLuhan, Gerbner) have argued explicitly against treating their subject matter as paralleling to anything so mundane as a "media effect." Nevertheless, several mass communication theories, as detailed in this chapter, are speaking to matters of response

formation, response reinforcement, and/or response change. In addition, the cumulative insights provided by various lines of research that have utilized these theories represent the full range of communication inputs highlighted by McGuire (albeit to varying degrees). Future research building off of the myriad of rich theoretical mass communication traditions offered in this chapter would be well served to better understand how any new inquiry reflects the study of response formation, reinforcement, or change. Making light of this most immediate connection to persuasion would allow any single empirical media effects work to be connected to a much broader set of insights already offered within the field.

Mass communication inquiry can utilize persuasion theory at two levels. The most basic level reflects thinking about effects-based research from the standpoint of Miller and McGuire. As already stressed, there needs to be better recognition of Miller's definition of persuasion being about formation, reinforcement, and change, and a corresponding reassessment of what constitutes an "effect." In addition, looking at any one media effect from the standpoint of McGuire's five communication input variables (i.e., message, source, recipient, channel, and context) can reveal gaps in what we know about any one type of media phenomenon. All of these input variables are at work at some level in the production of media influence, but not all have been addressed in the study of any one type of effect.

The more advanced level is representative of seeking to create more formal links between theories of persuasion and theories of media influence. The work of Shrum (1995, 1996, 1997) is a solid example of the potential benefits derived from linking persuasion-based theories (e.g., HSM) with a traditional mass communication theory (e.g., cultivation) to provide new insights as to why media are having impacts on individuals and societies. Bringing persuasion theory into the fold of existing mass communication theories could serve to enrich several lines of

inquiry in all contexts within which media are analyzed. The arguments and linkages offered in this chapter should serve as nothing more than a jumping off point from which more substantive theoretical connections can be formed that would allow for new knowledge about communication to be generated.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter is to establish more formal links between the studies of media influence and persuasion. First, a typology was constructed that reflected an appropriate bounding of both areas of influence. Persuasion is defined as encompassing response formation, response reinforcement, and response change (Miller, 1980/2002); and a media effect consists of five communication inputs: message, source, recipient, channel, and context (McGuire, 1989). Various pieces of media effects scholarship were then slotted into the 3 (Miller) × 5 (McGuire) matrix to show that there is an exhaustive list of media effects works that address all response-communication input combinations. Stepping beyond the individual study level, five mass communication theories are presented in relation to the study of persuasion. Not only do various elements of persuasion become evident in single empirical works detailing a variety of media effects, but the basic tenets of persuasion-based processes of communication influence can be found in media's most important theories. No grand theory of media influence as persuasion is offered in this work, but what is being stressed is that seeking to form closer connections between persuasion and media effects scholarship can bring greater organizational power to our understanding of media influence. In addition, extracting persuasion elements from the study of media influence may aid in the advancement of core persuasion theories. It is our hope that the connections forged in this chapter will serve as a starting point for more fruitful discussions on how the studies of

persuasion and media influence can reciprocate in a manner that allows for knowledge advancement on some of our most basic and important communicative processes.

Notes

1. Sensation Seeking is defined as a biologically based personality trait that reflects a willingness to take risks in order to experience physiological arousal (Stephenson, Hoyle, Palmgreen, & Slater, 2003).

2. The term "priming" as employed by political communication scholarship is distinct from how it is utilized in more classic psychological work (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2002). The priming effects described in political communication media effects scholarship play themselves out over a longer period of time than what is outlined in psychology and deal most squarely with what aspects of a particular object are utilized by an individual when evaluating the object.

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