



## A New Theoretical Debate in Communication Sciences: Active Producer Audience

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### Abstract

Digital technologies cause significant changes in the communication sciences. Especially the use of them in all areas of communication in society has led to the creation of new forms of communication. These developments mean that communication sciences are getting both methodological and theoretically into a new turning point. This means that the concepts and terms in the communication sciences will be reviewed. Therefore, all these developments should be considered and rethought on the communication sciences. All these developments are perhaps signals that communication sciences are heading towards a new paradigm. This short article should also be considered as a brief description of this change and transformation in the field of communication.

## 1. Introduction

In this essay, I try to think about new trends of Communication science, especially I will focus on the audience in the new media era. Indeed the audience of new media era is not similar to the audience of traditional media. And I can say that changing audience means changing theories. So we should rethink on the theories and models in Communication science again. I'll try to discuss this issue in this brief text.

The importance and power of Communication firstly discovered in Ancient Times. Agora was exactly a remarkable Communicative phenomenon. Another indication of importance of Communication was Aristotle's Rhetoric. While Aristotle emphasizing the importance of speech and Communication for interaction between individuals in community, he didn't ignore the importance of audience or spectators. It also can be said the first model of Communication developed by Aristotle. Therefore Aristotle is the Thinker who began doing the first analytical studies in the field of Communication (Aristotle,1991). Aristotle argue that Communication is a process and has following four elements: speaker, speech, audience and impact. He also emphasized environmental conditions in processing

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of Communication. Therefore Aristotle can be considered as the first founding thinker of Communication science.

## **2. A Brief Summary of The Early Communication Studies Developed Through Positive Sciences**

The first Communication studies developed in behavioral approach in the beginning of 19. Century. According to this approach organism is open to all influences from outside. So the people who open to mass media are under the influences of them. Thus, it can be said that, the sender of the mass media are active, but their receptors or audiences are passive. Moreover, it was thought that, every information sent through the media, received and used by audience as sender wants. So audience, while passively receiving, actively using. At this point, it is assumed that, who, what message, to whom, through which channel and its effect were planned (Güngör,2015).

According to this view, the individuals known as passive audiences and active users are accepted the healthy members of the healthy society. Therefore these healthy individuals are aware of the media's benefit. On the other hand, it is assumed that the media actors or producers know what they send, through which channel, to whom and how effectively. Because they are also the members of the healthy society. The proponents of this view also argue that mass media structured in society to provide good and useful information for people. From this point, Communication studies, especially started by American researchers have mostly focused on effects of mass media. Especially the studies have done by scientists from The University of Chicago have made a great contribution to the development of communication science. We can say that, the researchers like Harold Lasswell, Walter Lippman, Paul Lazarsfeld and many others known the founder of Communication science. The studies mostly done by American universities are called mainstream Communication theories and improved in liberal paradigm (Baran, S.J. D.K. Davis,2006).

## **3. Mass Society and Passive Audience**

Another theory which appeared within behavioral approach in the beginning of 19th. Century is theory of mass society. Although this theory, like the theories developed in liberal paradigm, improved through behavioral sciences, it was formed with a different argument. Namely, mass society theory, like theories developed by American scientists, based on passive audience thesis. But there is an important difference between both. That is according to the former, positioning of the passive audience is good and positive, but the latter describes the passive audience as negative. Because of mass society theory born in critical approach was based on this view.

Therefore, the studies done in critical approach, and in the theory of mass society revealed different results. Namely, according to both approaches, audience is describes as passive individual, but it is not the same passivity. Passive audience appeared in liberal paradigm is conscious and need to information sending from media, but, the passive audience emerged from mass society theory is truly passive and unconscious individual. And according to this theory, all the members of the community are similar and considered to be atomic units, and society is a

homogenous structure. These atomic units are open to any kind of impact. One of the most important factors is mass media. The proponents of critical approaches think that any type of information sent through mass media is received and used by audiences. Masses mostly received the messages came from media without thinking and unconsciously. Especially the members of Frankfurt School, like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse are the most insistent advocates of critical theory. In consequence they have firstly used the concept of mass society. Also the concepts such as mass culture and especially culture industry developed by them. One of the most important thinkers of Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer wrote his famous book *Culture Industry* in the middle of 1930s. And then Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* is one of the best known books revealing Frankfurt Thought.

On the other hand, mass society theory mostly supported by Frankfurt School thinkers was gaining concreteness with rising fascism ruled by dictators like Hitler and Mussolini. Truly masses ran eagerly pursue dictators' without asking and thinking what they do. Thus dictators made all they want to their masses. Because they knew the masses were open to all type of manipulation coming from the authorities. Therefore we can say that, these political movements in Europe is considered as reinforcer of mass society theory. On the one side there were powerful dictators, on the other side there were passive masses opened to any kind of manipulations. So the studies on Communication, and also on mass media mostly based on this theory and developed through critical paradigm.

#### **4. The Prominence of the Individual and Active Audience Theory**

While Europe tried to heal the wounds of war and cleaning the last remnants of fascism, America had already started to redesign the world of the future. This new world is not on the passive masses, would rise on the shoulders of new free and powerful individuals. This new individual's power is not just originated from his mind, also depends on his emotion, his social environment, the culture he grew in, his position in public sphere, his job, even his appearance etc. The new individuals are expected being more free, more courageous, more determined, more entrepreneurs etc. Because the World of the future would be established by this new individuals.

The liberalism of this new era was different from the early liberalism as well. Neoliberalism, not only based on the individual as early liberalism. Neoliberalism had a pluralistic feature including social, racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, linguistic and gender differences. Hence it can be said that, the new system based on fragmented structure had replaced the integrated social system which emerged from the early modernism. Thus it would be easier to dominate fragmented and less power areas than integrated and more powerful areas. And it would be easier to manage the whole global World. The name of this new system has been globalized World. And the new individual of this new world are more active, more ambitious and more interested in and more participated in social affairs. Therefore, this new individuals are now more interested in media and more desirous to use these means. According to mainstream theorists of Communication, this new audiences can also use media more consciously and more strategically. The active audience of mass media try to get information,

without waiting for sented by someone, Because this audiences know what sort of information they want, how they achieve it and for what they use it. According to American sociologist Joseph Klapper (1960) audience individuals are selectively open to the media; they are selectively interested in media and receive the message selectively as well. Hence, it can be said that the operation of mass Communication process is based on the audiences.

This approach, highlighted active audience individuals, is named active audience theory and based on uses and gratification model in Communication (Blumler,1974). According to the model, Communication process is started by the individual who needs information, and ended as achieving the information. Briefly, audiences who needs information opens to media for looking for it, and when they achieve, uses it and satisfied.

According to this theory, audience is just receiver, but in the real sense not active audience. Whereas, real active audiences are not just receiver of the messages coming from media, but at the same time, must be producers.

### **5. A New Paradigm Footsteps: Active Producer Audience**

So far The issues we have discussed here is actually a short summary of theories and concepts which are supported or opposed by communication scientists, Also we can understand that most of these theories or concepts are mostly conclusions of the studies focused on traditional media. Now, we are in a new era. Therefore we have to leave our old taboos and instead of this, now we should pour the pebbles out of skirts and then mix them with new and collecting again. we have to do new researches and studies in accordance to new developments in communication life. There are certainly many studies, and it is known many Communication scientists who are doing research on new trends in Communication field. But in the other side, it is getting more difficult to anal and to understand the new developments, especially formed by digital technology, through the traditional theories and models in Communication field. So we need new theories and models to describe new developments through digital technology. The fact that very important changing and turning have began in using of media, in behavior of audience, lifestyle of audience people, in interaction of society by new digital technology. It can't be said that the passive audience has been disappeared now. They existed, but the ways and means of their passivity has been changed. On the one hand, we should emphasize the new opportunities provided by new Communication Technologies, on the other hand, it is drawn attention to masses which have been indirectly passivated by these technologies today. Namely, the masses, especially uneducated ordinary people that has become more passive because of digital Technology. So that the gap between uneducated masses and new media based digital technology is getting wider. in the result of this, ordinary people and passive audiences are getting being more passive. On the other hand, active audiences, especially more educated people are getting being more active in following and using new media. Unfortunately the gap between educated people and uneducated masses in society is growing rapidly.

This progress in the field of communication requires rethinking on the theories and concepts. In particular, we see the emergence of two new kinds of audiences in

the new media environment. On the one hand, more passive audiences, on the other hand, more active audiences. But the audiences who follow new media can't be considered just as audience. They should also be described as users. So that, it is necessary a new term. Perhaps the most appropriate term here is **active users**.

On the other hand we shouldn't be ignore social media which is a kind of new media. So that, social media followers, at the same time listening, watching, writing, taking photos and they can send them to each other. In this situation the concept of active users is not enough to describe new type of audience, particularly, followers of social media.

Also the audience of traditional media is even different than before. There are many differences between the audience of traditional Communication means and the audience of digital Communication means. The audience of digital media are more active. Because today's Communication technology can provide more interactive watching for audience. While today's audience watching television, for instance, can take part in broadcasting simultaneously through mobile phone, The same situation is also valid for readers of writing press. If they want, they are able to contribute to the flow of news online newspaper. Citizen journalism is exactly like that. So besides of being active viewers, today's audience can be called producer. They know what they need, they can chose what they want, they watch actively and they can give feedback to senders. At the same time through their mobile phone, today's audiences can produce new information and send it to the producers of media. Therefore they are able to participated in media environment as active producer audiences.

## **6. Conclusion**

With the new media era, as determined by digital technology, many aspects of the functioning of communications, said that a new era has begun. This new era, not only on the formation of audience, but will also have important effects on social climate. As depending of its effects in macro and micro social areas, new media maybe cause important changes in human and social life. Indeed it has already begun partially its signs. So far, the dominant thought is that, mass media inform masses from top to down. But now, this thought began to change with digital communication technology that allows interactive Communication. The impact of this trend will be important for both the future of Communication sciences and generally for the whole social sciences. All these developments will undoubtedly require firstly rethinking on available models and theories and then trying the development of new models and theories in the field of Communication. I think, active producer audience will be one of the most important concept of Communication science in the future. if this concept will be considered in the axis, I seem to hear the footsteps of a new paradigm in Communication Science.

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