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Communication as a Discipline

Views from Europe

Communication Research Paradigms

Reflections on Paradigm Change in Communication Theory and Research

DENIS MCQUAIL
University of Amsterdam

Introduction

The notion of "paradigm change" is open to discussion, lacking a precise formal definition. We can make do with a provisional and somewhat elastic view, seeing it as a fundamental change in the way of thinking about a phenomenon, affecting a central core of the subject and with wide implications not only for theorizing and research but for application to empirical reality. In the case of a scientific field, even a ramifying and loosely defined one such as communication, the change should be both enduring and widely recognized. It should also, in principle, be irreversible, although not, of course, precluding further change.

Certain other features of the communication field are also relevant. It is relatively young, spanning a period of little more than three generations, and it has a rather high dependence (contingency) on the actual practice of communication (especially in public), and thus on external events and circumstances. The reference here is primarily to the technical *means* of communication and also the predominant applied *purposes* of communication (informing, persuading, selling, entertaining, etc.). In both areas, there has been continuous change, now with accelerated speed, outpacing the leisured process of scholarly reflection.

The aim in this article is to give a preliminary assessment of the changes that have already been freely dubbed "paradigmatic." Do they fit the definition given above? At what level and with what scope do they apply? Are we speaking of change in the singular, or in multiple terms? The questions are raised because the field of study has become increasingly fragmented, and the term *paradigm change* typically involves the assumption of a broad reference across a whole field. The sum of several disparate changes of thinking across a larger field does not amount to what is generally understood by the term. But we can approach the question at issue more manageably by dealing separately with a few main clusters of issues. Those that have received the most attention fall under the following three headings: communication effects, media audiences and uses, and communication relationships.

The Founding Paradigm and Its Gradual Decline

It will help to focus the discussion more clearly if we first summarize the most widely accepted formulation of an observed general shift. This relates to the notion of mass communication, effectively the founding paradigm of media use and effects in an age that was in awe of the newly flexed muscle of advertisers and propagandists, under the favorable conditions that prevailed in the first half of the 20th century (e.g., Blumer, 1939). All societal factors seem to combine well with the leading properties of the new means of industrialized communication by way of print, radio, and film. These features consisted primarily of the following: a capacity to reach, more or less, a whole population simultaneously, as if gathered together as a crowd, although dispersed; direct contact with each person, bypassing the barriers and filters of culture, custom, family, religion, or politics; a capacity for complete control of content at the source, leading to a conformity if not uniformity of message and effect, as far as desired by a state or other powers. Many of the conditions were supported by, or summed up in the concept of, mass society (Bramson, 1960; Kornhauser, 1960; Mills, 1956). The mass media were thus potent instruments of control, although not announced as such. Perhaps most favorable to the model of mass control was the fact that submission of the audience was not only voluntary but often enthusiastic. The mass media and mass communication were not typically imposed on the masses. They were sought out by the individual members of the mass.

This conception (it was hardly a concept) of mass communication was popularized by the early would-be mass persuaders whose ambitions and interests it served (Berelson & Janowitz, 1953; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953). It was also implicitly adopted by social critics, reformers, and guardians of the public interest, since it gave some collective force to an otherwise diverse set of concerns about the effects. But it also helped to focus the attention of a new cohort of social researchers on issues of public communication, giving a clear point to inquiries in the shape of the search for evidence of effects (Klapper, 1960). The underlying ideas available for shaping hypotheses were both simple and plausible and of interest to diverse constituencies of advocates and critics of mass media.

The mass communication concept also served as a broad source of hypotheses about effects expected to follow from the dominant forms and uses of public communication. Prominent among the hypotheses of change were the following expectations:

- Change would be in line with actual content received, itself largely equivalent to content as sent.
- Effect would increase in proportion to amount of exposure.
- The process would be typically unmediated and one-directional.
- Variable kinds and degrees of effect could be expected.

The Rise of a New Paradigm

The end of the age of mass communication has often been announced, ever since alternatives to mass distribution began to be developed, starting in the 1960s (e.g., Enzensberger, 1970; Maisel, 1973).

By the end of the 20th century and certainly since then, it has hardly been in question that public communication is well on the way to being better represented by a new paradigm, although no single name has been coined. Nearly all the features highlighted by the idea of mass communication have been modified or reversed, and additional new possibilities are developing, with different assumptions about the consequences. Moreover, the new paradigm is occupying territory that once provided the main fields of application for mass communication, namely large-scale advertising, mass political campaigning, popular journalism, and entertainment, plus a large range of specialized information and consumer markets.

The distinctive features of the new paradigm of communication (also a broad conception rather than a concept) reverse several fundamental pillars of the old one, especially by effectively abolishing most of the posited features: one-directional flow, uniformity of content sent and received, simultaneity of impact, central control of what is sent and received, center-peripheral flow as the dominant model, quite strict limits on the capacity of systems to carry public messages, and openness to public gaze and availability to all. The new paradigm has its own advocates and boosters, with various agendas of a political, social, commercial, and cultural kind, but the developments of communication on which it is based seem spontaneous and self-generated, with new purposes and applications seeking the means and new means seeking purposes. Put at its most succinct, the primary characteristics of communication according to the new paradigm are as follows:

- Interactivity and exchange of messages, meanings, and roles
- Open and ready accessibility to channels to send and receive
- Multimediality
- Lack of central control and regulation of supply and choice
- Unlimited capacity
- Low or negligible transmission costs
- No longer territorial in base (no fixed location)
- Diversity and flux of control, content and uses
- Relative "undetermination" of direction, meaning, and possible consequences (Poster, 1999)

Intermediate (Between Old and New) Thinking About Communication

Many questions remain to be answered about the likely future form and direction of what still seems a quite undetermined but internally consistent path of development, but it is time to look more closely at what happened in between the old and new eras to bring about such an apparent paradigmatic reversal. Superficially, it might seem to be simply a response to technological developments, following a logic of steadily increasing productivity, capacity, and versatility. Yet this does not in itself explain changes in theories and concepts as well as in methods and designs of research that have accompanied, or even preceded, the emergence of the new paradigm.

The application of successive technologies of production and transmission to tasks of communication does not require any new thinking of this kind for practical purposes. It only becomes useful when there is a need to understand or explain the direction and drift of change and to evaluate its actual or possible consequences in a wider perspective. It is arguable that a gradual revolution in thought about communication is as much responsible for the appearance on the ground of new communication realities as is the forward march of innovation in technology or the apparent demands of a newly emerging (or rapidly enlarging) market sector. The paradigmatic revolution in thought allows futures to be imagined, in ways not dissimilar to the influence of art and literature, but with more precision and respect for the constraints of reality.

It should be recalled that changes in thinking about communication can be located in a rather larger box of ideas about society, according to which, in less than 100 years, we have moved, it is said, from an industrial society to an information society with features that resonate very well with the contrasting paradigms that have been sketched (Bell, 1973; Schement & Curtis, 1995). The point is made to remind us of the interdependence, and parallelism, of fundamental trends of change and of the complexity of issues, which makes it all the more necessary to have some general concept (it can be called a paradigm) to work with.

Another general observation about the overall shape of change that has become apparent in thinking about societywide communication relates to early differences over the central definition of the concept of communication itself. Without rehashing old debates, it is worth recalling that differences turned on two or three key points. One of these was the question of purposefulness, with some preference going to restricting the concept to actions with a conscious intention (to communicate) and/or with a receiver in mind, as opposed to other possibilities—for instance, reception, representations, expression, or simply social interaction for intrinsic benefits. An exclusive adherence to intentional and targeted communication would be impossible, but a strong bias in this direction is enough to color the balance of attention and emphasis of the general concept.

A related disputed element in communication in the founding days of the field, much picked upon later, was the emphasis on the notion of *transmission* to characterize the action or process of communication. It is this emphasis that leads to a predominant view of communication as the activation of a linear channel (physical or social) between a sender and a receiver, with the meaning conceived as a message or packet to be carried from one to the other and delivered as sent, followed possibly by a message sent in return. This is a very simple concept of communication for practical purposes of planning distribution systems and evaluating their operation, assessing effects, and so on—thus, in fact, the stuff of most early and much continuing communication research (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). However, it has always been open to objection on grounds of its utilitarian and illiberal bias. Communication is identified as a resource of power, or influence (though also of opposition to power), primarily a method of control for some purpose, or an object of control. Its larger significance in social intercourse is passed by. It would largely exclude artistic communication, ritual, decoration, and much else. Carey (1975) spoke of a "ritual" model of communication in contrast to one of "transportation."

The basis for the alternative school(s) of communication, including the new paradigm, has been suggested already in these remarks. A much more inclusive notion of communication would allow it to

stand for a wide spectrum of phenomena and to be open to diverse perceptions, preferences, and definitions and to take many equally valid forms. Among essential points of the alternative perspective are an equivalence (therefore interchangeability) of sender and receiver roles of transmission and exchange, of many different processes; an acceptance of many uses of communication by those who participate; and an emphasis on meaning as the key feature, whether intended or unintended, perceived or not. Such initiatives have been recognized in the now much broader overall boundary drawing of the field. The central point to emphasize is that seeds of a new paradigm, now largely accepted as accomplished fact, have long been present, and their germination cannot, and certainly need not, be attributed to technology and revised demands of the market for information.

In setting the course for most early mass communication research, opting for a linear, transmission model of communication was not accidental, nor was it the only possible way of exploring and testing the hypotheses spelled out or latent in the concept of mass communication as initially outlined. There are roots in the model adopted by the social sciences more generally and in the particular circumstances of the problem area. In human affairs, the idea of communication was always strongly associated with motivated and directed communication: religious conversion, political movements and persuasion, the exercise of authority by government and other powers, extension of empire, and so on. In the period of modernization coinciding with the rise of mass media, even more emphasis was placed on communication in the economy (advertising and marketing), politics (mass voting and campaigning, propaganda, and reform movements), mass education, and effective public information. In a subsequent phase of modernization, the focus turned to the task of economic and social development in the third world (e.g., Lerner, 1958; Rogers, 1962).

The questions most insistently occupying the attention of relevant elites were how to either achieve the above-mentioned purposes most efficiently and effectively or cope with the potential problems arising from failures to communicate or from unwanted side effects of mass communication (disturbance to social norms and values, loss of control, social fragmentation, individual dysfunctions). Priorities for research, and, inevitably, theory to go along with it, followed the lines laid down by such considerations and the availability of funds to pay for answers to practical questions.

The Media Effects School Leads the Way in Adaptation

It is fruitful to look more closely at the intellectual history of research into the separate branches of inquiry, as mentioned above, especially with the media effects tradition. Over the same approximate period of 50 years, this has exhibited what some have described as a paradigm change of its own, or at least a substantial progression of proposed models (Neuman, 2011; Perse, 2001). It is by now quite a familiar story, although perceived with varying time scales and emphases. Despite some contention, the field of research into media effects (defined as the consequences of the working of, or exposure to, mass media, whether or not intended) can be described in terms of a series of phases marked by new thinking and input from research findings but also increasingly differentiated according to level of analysis, sphere of relevance, and type of effect. The first phase more or less corresponds to the premises built into the concept of mass communication as outlined above. It was a time when quite large and measurable effects were expected from exposure to the ubiquitous and repetitive message of mass media, although with variations and exceptions.

The nature of effects was largely to be determined by the purposes of the sender or the overt meaning of content. The stimulus-response model of influence was taken as the main basis for relevant thinking from which deviations and exceptions could be developed. A revision of this rather broad and primitive expectation developed quite rapidly (by the mid-20th century), based on findings of reliable research, with recognition of many conditions and intervening variables that can affect the occurrence and strength of effects (e.g., DeFleur, 1970). These related, variously, to the status of the source, the nature of the channel and message, the motivation of the receiver, and other relevant attributes. Central to revision was an awareness of the key part played by selectivity—in both reception and perception of meaning. The significance of reinforcement (no change) as an effect was also recognized. It also became apparent that mass communication does not operate outside and above the preexisting channels of communication and social relations in which most of us are enmeshed. Thinking about communication effects also reflected a fuller appreciation of the wider social forces affecting communication, already a step to new thinking (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1956). A significant element in the revision of ideas was the recognition that receivers are not the passive mass once imagined but instead also have varied motives relevant to the acceptance or rejection of different kinds of influence (Blumler & Katz, 1974).

The outcome of early effects research was generally reassuring about the potential for successful application of media to chosen ends in society, and it calmed fears of unintended social harm. This calm was broken by new ideas and new impulses toward reassessing the true influence of mass communication—seen now as more potent as well as more insidious and threatening than had been realized. It is hard to account precisely for the change, but a general label was supplied by German scholar Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1973) in an article titled "Return to the Concept of Powerful Mass Media." The background to the wide recognition of this formulation can be understood at least in part by the particular historic moment—a time of social and international unrest. Aside from the real-world events in an era that was far from settled or peaceful (the Vietnam War, insurgency in Latin America, Middle East conflict, an oil crisis, heightened Cold War tension, the rumblings of discontent of the post-1968 generation, industrial conflicts, and more), two other causes can be adduced for renewed attention to powerful media.

One was the rise of television nearly everywhere to a dominance of news stories, images, and frames, with little diversity, rekindling the suspicion that here indeed was a source of power, especially when linked to U.S. global power. Another was the popularity of new critical analyses directed at the hegemonic influence of mass media rather than their purposeful propaganda effectiveness. It was the half-hidden, barely intended ideology of reigning elites and regimes that worked toward suppressing the potential for radical change and holding an old order in place. Theories of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) were about equally matched in weight by a parallel development among critical scholars of a belief in the latent, but also strong, potential for resistance to ideological propaganda, based on an arousal of consciousness and a capacity to perceive and counter the bias of dominant media. The decoding of meanings became a central element in the range of methods of research (Hall, 1980).

The new ideas were as attractive to a new generation of students of media as the original mass communication notions had once been. The reassurance offered by conventional effects research was seen as quite inadequate to deal with large-scale and long-term collective effects on climates of opinion, states of mind, and broad social attitudes rooted in lived experience. A belief in powerful effects operating

insidiously and slowly was fueled by studies of news content in the 1970s and 1980s showing how little trust could be placed in the conventions and norms of objective journalism, how much unintended bias there was, and how much these features could be traced not to somewhat mysterious forces of conspiracy but quite simply to the dominance of a uniform news agenda as well as to the way in which most news was actually made—according to a common "media logic" (Altheide & Snow, 1979) rather than a logic of truth and enlightenment.

Despite the potential for resistance, an accumulation of evidence gathered under the banner of unreconstructed empirical effect research testified to the extent and predictability of a certain range of cognitive effects on individuals. This showed how powerful effects could be achieved without resorting to suppositions about ideological meaning. For instance, the evidence of a broad agenda-setting effect of a steady flow of consistent news and of a "cultivating effect" of a certain artificial, but repeatedly reinforced, view of the world as imagined by mass media (Signorielli & Morgan, 1990), although in neither case conclusive, were pointing in the same direction. Noelle-Neumann's (1974) "spiral of silence" hypothesis posited a mass media–driven trend to conformity under conditions of modified hegemony of ideology and interpretation, based largely on the supply of information that suggested a distribution of opinion favoring one side of the political divide.

The reawakened willingness to accept the hypothesis of powerful media was enriched by other strands of theory and new evidence. Among the first of these new developments was the acceptance of a broad constructionist view, according to which media reports of events were constructed by newsmakers and other media sources under external pressure, and the resulting message was liable to differential understanding by audiences according to varied perceptions and interests (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). The case seems to match not so much a changed paradigm of the effect process in any detail but a changed or simply broadened concept of what is most significant as ultimate effect. That different kinds of effect should involve different processes and methods of investigation should not be unexpected and is quite consistent with the "normal science" outlook and causal reasoning of the early days of media effects research. However, the successful application of a new conceptual frame to the process requires both extensive knowledge and understanding of the relevant conditions and some creativity in fitting the various elements together. Creativity is called for in particular by the imminent dissolution of the entire mass communication phenomenon itself (i.e., one-way monopolistic flow to many from a center, etc.).

Media Audience, Reception, and Use as a Separate Field

Another primary branch of inquiry that gradually came to follow new lines of scholarly development relates to the media audience, although it began as little more than one key data point in the scheme of media effects—that labeled *receiver*. Initially, the audience was seen as little more than the (very large) and heterogeneous aggregate that was temporarily assembled as listeners, readers, and viewers and then allowed to disperse, having been united by no more than common attention to the message of the moment. The concept of mass audience was regarded in its early days as a unique creation of the rapidly changing times and the new capacity for reaching large numbers with shared popular tastes or even whole national populations. Some would interpret this as inevitable in a mass society, whatever the level of democracy and freedom, given the weakening of other social ties. As with the initially postulated effects, so the concept of mass audience exaggerated the individuation, anomie,

and social fragmentation of mass media reception and use. This was consistent with the assumption of apparently passive and trusting reception of whatever was being transmitted under conditions of free choice.

The gradual emergence over the years of a more valid representation of the audience was an outcome of both incremental improvement of research ideas and methods and an accumulation of reliable evidence (McQuail, 1997). It was also due to a fundamentally altered conception of the position and outlook of the audience member, looked at without preconceptions. Initially it was a matter of charting the social and psychological contours of the actual audiences as they were constituted in circles of family, friends, and neighborhoods, differentiated by culture, tastes, interests, access, and dispositions. More important was the shift toward viewing and understanding audience experience from the subjective perspective of the audience member and its wider context.

The notion of an audience as a set of anonymous aggregates, manipulated by media managers, did not die easily, precisely because it was a practical one for media planners, advertisers, marketers, and all other would-be communicators and sellers of content. The reassessment of audience readily accepted the notion of audience as, in various ways and to varying degrees, "active" in choice and use (Biocca, 1988). Without this, the evident selectivity and, often, habituality of an actual audience could not be understood. This move away from the primitive mass concept was accounted as useful knowledge for the same reasons as just noted.

Less easy to reconcile with the assumption of continuity and cumulation was the introduction of perspectives that subordinated the role of media to the vagaries of perception and the self-defined priorities of subcultures and social groups. But in the practice of inquiry, a clear rift was evident between different schools of research. On the one hand was a traditional bookkeeping, gradually made easier and more reliable by way of electronic recording of use, plus focused studies of motives and preferences for different contents and purposes (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). On the other hand, audience research gave way to the study of reception, in which what matters most is the context and attributed meaning of the event as well as the content of what is attended (Alasuutari, 1999). This way of looking at audience experience subordinates any purpose of a communicator and renders unreliable the supposition of an observer, uninformed by detailed awareness of the matters mentioned. The study of audience ceases to be a mere adjunct of effects research, and, in some ways, the idea of audience becomes no more than an abstract term to deal with a wide and mixed field of human experience, with little meaning in the bookkeeping context for planning and evaluation of markets and service performance. The field of study of media discourse and texts (not discussed here) made its distinctive contribution to the revised way of thinking about audience, especially by emphasizing the polysemy of texts. The notion of an audience as a self-defined, interpretive community highlights the newly claimed autonomy of the audience of former times.

New Patterns of Communicative Relationships

The original idea of a truly mass (and atomized) audience met an early death by way of early evidence of both diversification and social organization in media use behavior, compounded in the 1960s and 1970s by the multiplication of highly individuated devices for transmission and reception and a

greater variety of media experiences. A key moment occurs for the history of audience research when it was recognized that the archetypal form of audience, descended from the historical precedent of public drama and spectacle, was giving way to or being supplemented by alternatives made possible by computerization and transmission via the telecommunication network. The original model of one-to-many, center-peripheral, simultaneous transmission was joined by equally feasible and available possibilities of "consultation" (where many individuals consult the "center" at their own convenience) and "conversational" mode, in which a center is bypassed and participants exchange and interact with each other with self-determined content. Bordewijk and van Kaam (1986), in their innovative outline of these patterns, also remind us of an additional type of arrangement that characterizes the Internet: the possibility of an infrastructural center being able to keep track of all traffic of whatever type in a very large network. On one view this seems to reinvent a less intrusive but more powerful version of mass communication.

A partial consequence of the changes described has been the delocalization of the audience; it no longer occupies a fixed place on the physical map that allowed one to chart the reach and possible influence of earlier forms of media. Mobility of reception, too, brings potential social consequences, although the newer forms of accounting and control of users are less dependent on knowledge of location. The phrase "death of the audience" began to be heard to refer to such developments.

The only sense in which an audience might be said to remain was in the aggregate of those connected with a network, which has only limited significance in the present context. The consequences of digitization and network formation based on the Internet go beyond the points mentioned—for instance, to encompass the notion of virtual communities of participants in distant intercommunication for their own purposes, with some continuity of membership and stable identity (Jones, 1997).

Open access to the Internet has encouraged a multiplication of new entrants as communicators who have, inter alia, engaged in publishing personal weblogs for self-defined intentions, sometimes just self-expressive, but with a range of other possible motivations. More recently, the new form or phenomenon of social media has given rise to new groupings of "intercommunicators," all linked remotely to each other, but more immediately to innumerable smaller circles of senders and receivers, beyond detailed description or counting but not beyond the capacity of the network to track down to the level of individuals and build detailed profiles of net use behavior and user characteristics.

There is an affinity between the early "rediscovery of people" (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1956) in the relation of dependency or not of audiences on media sources, and the recent acceptance that no clear boundary exists between interpersonal and private communication and the elements of public communication that are imported into the private sphere by the Internet. The use of the same network and device for personal and public sphere use contrasts with the clear separation of the two in the early days of mass communication. Relevant here is the growing fact of interchangeability of roles of audience and producer as the former are encouraged to import their own contributions in various forms to public transmission (Deuze, 2007).

Toward a New Paradigm?

Returning to the central theme of paradigm change, there are clearly some features of the separate histories of effects and audience research that coincide. Both reflect a more realistic awareness of the very limited capacity of the still-existing mass media to achieve their intended effects unilaterally and of the low level of predictability. Such results have to be in one way or another negotiated, although this term shades into the notion of manipulation rather easily. Both involved recognition of the great diversity of situations and possibilities of communication at a distance. Both have incorporated an awareness of the intervention of social and cultural variables into every stage of the processes at issue.

The case for recognizing the arrival of a new paradigm has been stated earlier largely in terms of the rejection or reversal of some of what were believed to be key features of the old paradigm of mass communication. Its gradual decline was due in part to changed circumstances of both technology and society and partly to its own defects. It was blind to more influential factors affecting communication, underestimating the many counterforces to mass persuasion, especially in the social and cultural context of reception. Perhaps most fundamental was its essentially *mechanistic* bias and formulation, the result of the dominant empiricist tendencies in the social sciences as well as the demands of would-be persuaders who put a price on costs and outcomes. Communication research designed to test and advance ideas about communication has been profoundly individualistic in methodology and always inclined to neglect what cannot be precisely observed, measured, or manipulated.

There is not much satisfaction to be gained from the various attempts to repair the paradigm. It still misses the point of what might be required for a fundamental advance of understanding of communication. A central missing element (unmeasured and therefore ignored) is a clear focus on what public communication is most centrally about. This is not one thing, but a diversity of phenomena, all involving meaning, all familiar in general terms, often in experience; all hard, if not impossible, to describe, to pin down and demarcate; maybe impossible to measure. They are, in effect, all *insubstantial* entities, even though real as perceived, lived, and experienced. The examples that come to mind include the following:

- Beliefs—political, religious, or other—as individually experienced and also as encoded structures of thought
- Fashions and taste cultures
- States of mind, especially as widely shared and with some public relevance
- Climates of opinion or attitude sets with force and direction
- Attachments (collective as well as individual), loyalties, and affinities relating to diverse objects: nations, ethnic groups, regions, faiths, family, and so on
- Social and revolutionary movements with their own dynamic
- Patterns of sociability and interaction
- Public debate and conversation around vital issues

All these examples are of communication and its outcomes, and each can be said to have been facilitated to varying degrees by the advances in communication technologies made available to individuals. They are more collective than individual in character. They involve temporary, unbounded formations. They are not easy, or even possible, to capture within the original mass communication paradigm since they are not originated and directed by a sender from a source and can only be approximately represented or indicated by way of fragmentary data, aided by subjective interpretation.

On an optimistic view, the materials seem now to be at hand for formulating a new, more all-embracing view of communication that might deserve to be called a new paradigm, superior to any predecessor. Such a revised view would recognize key properties of communication as a process: its openness to all; its organic, self-generating and self-guiding character; its circularity and reflexivity; its lack of precise objectives or manipulative intent; its participative character; its equivalence and copresence of vertical and horizontal flows between participants. The concept of effect becomes largely redundant or marginal, although the process itself involves real changes of states of mind and relationships and, therefore, of reality. The revised paradigm that seems to be struggling to emerge should be able to handle much more complex and mixed structures and patterns of communication at one time. Despite all this, it is not easy to see how the ideas, however much they appeal and make sense, can be put together in a robust and convincing form that will help in research or application.

It is not easy for those raised according to earlier notions of communication to grasp or to investigate without recourse to earlier mechanistic thinking. The appropriate entry point still seems to be by way of individuals as users, audiences, and consumers or as decision makers in organizations applying communication to some purpose of their own of influence or profit; as those who would seek to control others through communication systems in way or another. However, the traditional notion of effect is not going to be abandoned lightly.

It may be that what really stands in the way of a genuinely new paradigm of communication is the lack of sufficient motive to discover one. There is no shortage of creative advertisers and persuaders willing to contemplate almost any route into the attention and minds of potential consumers, without much caring how the end result is to be reached. The Internet has opened up a vast new playground for experimentation. Particularly captivating is the potential for using the compulsive attractions of social media as a vehicle, plus the immense new capacity for identifying, recording, and keeping track of target markets of consumers.

There is interest in a new paradigm in such quarters, but for practical ends of a traditional kind that might be served even better. There is much to be gained from new technology and learned from new thinking to assist in deploying more complex and effective models of mass communication. The concept may be out of date, but the essential processes at work in mass markets and mass politics are very much alive. The aim for many communicators is still to generate consumption and profits and for political persuaders to make converts, shape images on a broad scale, and control the increasingly complex public life of nations. Attachment to the old paradigm is not confined to these interests, since there is still in the collective behavior of actual audiences a survival of the very oldest model of shared attention by many to familiar genres of performance (drama, sport, games, etc.). The repertoire of noncontent uses has enlarged, but much remains the same. There is much continuing evidence indicating that habits of popular

attention to mass media are rooted in states of voluntary dependence and attraction, with little felt wish to participate or react. The point here is to underline the need for some clear thinking about what need there is for a new paradigm and what scope it should have. What can be accomplished by new thinking? How can diverse elements be integrated with each other?

It may be simply mistaken to look for a single improved and universal paradigm for communication in society. It may be preferable to consider new thinking as helping to forge a coherent new paradigm that does not repair or replace an older dominant one as described, but serves instead as an alternative. The story of communication research offers materials for more than one version of an alternative to the linear/transmission/effect model. For instance, apart from the new version suggested, there is still a relevant version of public communication that might be labeled as hegemonic, representing the situation of potentially powerful effects matched by equally strong resistance.

In Review

This article has been an exploration, without a clear map or certain destination. Looking back at the route followed, a summary of the thinking involves the following main line of argument. The general frame of a transition from old to new ways of thinking about the consequences of an immense expansion of communicative power and capacity in society globally since the late 19th century is still valid and useful. Such a transition seems at first sight most easily explained by reference to rapid changes in systems and technologies of communication that are still unfolding. However, this (technological) explanation may be misleading and is certainly not sufficient to reach an adequate understanding of the trajectory of change. In the period of time between the old and new, much else has changed, not least the birth and growth of a new field of inquiry dedicated to the study of communication, with its own divisions and body of theories and much evidence accumulated plus varied new perspectives of a fundamental kind affecting component areas of the field. New and broader conceptions of communication have been indicated and are still accumulating.

One might encapsulate the acknowledged paradigmatic shift by suggesting that "in the beginning" a big idea about social change in the emerging industrial era of large-scale and centralized nation states was married to a very narrow conception of communication as the (more or less) efficient technically mediated transmission of information from one point to another. Our new big idea is now much more complex and nuanced, even fragmentary and contested, but still has reference to ongoing changes in culture and society of a fundamental kind. As a result of new developments within the field of communication inquiry, we have a more adequate apparatus of concepts and ideas for relating the overarching ideas to the many new macroprocesses and microprocesses of communication that are now observable.

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