Book Review:

Denis McQuail. McQuail's Mass Communication Theory. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2010, (6th Ed.). ISBN 978-81-321-0579-4

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The book entitled "McQuail's Mass Communication Theory" is an apt account of media, society and culture. The book provides theoretical debates that are supported by empirical research evidence. McQuail provides an introduction of the evolution of media and society to date. The book presents a number of theoretical debates and research paradigms that further explore media content in a very explicit manner. Comprising of 20 chapters, the book has been categorized into eight parts i.e. preliminaries, theories, structures, organizations, content, audience, effects and the epilogue. The book expounds the function of theories which play in understanding the media and its role within the society and on people which consume the media content.

The first part which consists of two chapters introduces the book and the rise of mass media to the readers. The first chapter, 'Introduction to the Book' examines the purpose of mass communication or mass media, describes the structure of the book treatment of a variety of issues in mass communication. This chapter closes with a debate of the different kinds of theories and their relevance in mass media, and a brief analysis of the different traditions related to the research of communication science and mass communication.

The second chapter 'The Rise of Mass Media' enlightens readers to the origin of mass media as the concept is as old as human civilization itself. The modern history of mass media dates back to printed books-which revolutionized the dissemination of information. Then came the turn of newspapers-which were

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published regularly and were more secular and public orientated. The early newspapers were associated with party politics. Then several struggles i.e., ending of direct censorship, and technological advancement gave rise to late-nineteen-century bourgeois newspapers which were influential and audience-centred. However, magazines also have played a great role for promoting diversity in print media.

The end of the 18th century introduces film as a technological innovation. The decline of the nascent European film industry and monopolization of the American film industry after the First World War was another defining feature in the history of film. Radio and television, although, different in content, both evolved from existing technologies. In contemporary times, television plays a critical role in politics, besides, entertainment. Owing to the diversity of content, reach, and cold medium television not only has remained a credible medium but has also enjoyed dominance over radio. Internet has revolutionized the information super-high way and is challenging the monopoly of traditional media as it relates to information dissemination. According to McQuail, the question of freedom versus control of media is both political and cultural.

The Part two of the book encapsulates five chapters, from three to seven and is the largest chapter of the book. This part opens with chapter three, 'Concepts and Models for Mass Communication'. The 19th century can be termed as the adolescence period for mass media and people witnessed the mobilization of mass media in most of Europe and the United Sates resulting from the First World War. The use of media by Nazi Germany and the USSR further strengthened the perception that mass media held a key role in shaping the opinion and behaviours of the people.

Late nineteen and early twentieth century social scientists were very suspicious of undermining traditional values, secularizing and urbanizing role of the mass media. Therefore, mass media's social integration and educating role was questioned in the mass society context. The term mass communication is the discovery of the late 1930s and explains the

reach of mass media to diverse and heterogeneous mass audience. The powerful effect of media models and modern techniques (surveys, experiments and statistical tools) to explore such effects gave rise to a dominant paradigm for theory and research. It only took the United States a decade after the Second World War to hegemonize the research methods.

The development of information theory by Shannon and Weaver (1149), further endorsed the dominant paradigm. The critique of the Frankfurt School and other critical theorists on the dominant paradigm introduced the critical paradigm, which became the alternative paradigm for mass media research. It rejected single reality and value neutrality assumptions of the dominant paradigm and advocated for an interpretive and constructionist perspective of reality. Moreover, among the four models within the media communication debate, the transmission and attention models are media industry centred while the ritual and decoding models are audience centred and explain audience resistance to domain media content.

Chapter four, 'Theory of Media and Society', scrutinizes the debate of primacy of media and society. Mass media constructs social reality which is selective in nature and shapes our notion of social reality, and establish our cohesion with other members of the society accordingly. The social integration role of media is inconclusive; some social theorists claim that it causes fragmentation, while others argue that it contributes to integration. However, the interesting question, then, is who controls media power and in whose interests and whose version of social reality is actually presented? The economic interest biases media content and twists social construction of reality for the actors who finance media.

Chapter five, 'Mass Communication and Culture' sets out to explore the more cultural dimensions of theories introduced in the previous section and interdependence between mass communication and culture, hybridization of culture, diversity and identity, ideology and effects of technology on culture. The author investigates critique of mass culture from the Frankfurt School scholars' point of view who criticized mass media for

creating uniformity, escapism, production of false needs and reduction of individuals to mere customers. Conversely, the Birmingham School, departs from the Frankfurt School in a sense, that it emphasizes the audience's ability of decoding ideology encoded in media texts. It explains that media text is polysemy. In the concluding part of this culture, Hall's contribution to Feminism and the role media plays in marginalizing women in the public sphere are examined. The gendering of media content, according to the author, must be studied at media content production level since most framing is done by men at content selection and production level.

Chapter six, 'New Media-New Theory', explores the arrival of new media, its acceptance, on one hand, and sense of fear, on the other hand. The most basic feature of new media is digitization and convergence. Besides, availability of new media to all spheres of life, there are apprehensions that it may fall in the hands of those who enjoy privileged excess to content production and regulation. Also, the new trends in new media, offers social theorists an opportunity to review current theories with regard to media effects. The virtual community phenomenon is another new dimension of using media content, or resisting it in the form of feedback. The internet is an ideal form of public sphere, which provides citizens platform for conversation, debates, express their political view and exchange such views with fellow beings and even with politicians. The internet free flow of information has its own potential threats.

Chapter seven, 'Normative Theory of Media and Society', surveys rights and the responsibility of the media to society in the normative context. The debate revolves around four theories of press and lies ahead. The media being the fourth estate holds enormous power, therefore, normative theories, expound on media and society relationship. Authoritarian media claims that authority to regulate media content lies in the hands of kings and queens. Whereas, soviet theory, which exists no more with the end of cold war, contests that power lies in the hands of the ruling party to decide media content. On the other hand, the argument of libertarian theory is that media must be free to publish what it

wants, even if the opinion presented is wrong. But, the social responsibility theory argues that media should be responsible to society regarding its content and its effects on the society. The debates of normative takes shift and end with introduction of four models of media which are empirical in nature and pose the question of why is the media as it is?

Part 3 of the book consists of three chapters from chapter 8 to 10. The chapter 8, 'Media Structures and Performance: Principles and Accountability' briefly scrutinizes media freedom and performance in the context of media structures, diversity, equality, objectivity, and limits of objectivity. Likewise, in pluralistic societies, the media has to cater to complex norms, values and cultural equality, without becoming the agent of a dominant class. Then, the author, explains the meaning of media accountability as it relates to the liability and answerability mode context. This discussion follows four frames of media accountability: law and regulation, financial/market, public responsibility and professional responsibility.

Chapter nine, 'Media Economics and Governance', introduces media as a business rather than a social institution and offers four different perspectives to understand and explain this business. Hence, when media has more dependence on advertising as a source of revenue, its content becomes less independent from the influence of advertisers. Many theorists argue that media content always reflects the interests of those who finance it. The media concentration is another issue that raises many questions about the quality of media content. A rule of the thumb is that eight firms in the world control almost 70% media content production, distribution and audience. This leaves very little room for diversity and pluralism. This debate is summed up with the argument that social and political system determines the type of media system working in a particular society.

Chapter ten, 'Global Mass Communication', elucidates that technology, economics and expansion of telecommunications have been the driving force beyond globalization. In this globalized world, the flow of information is from center to periphery. The new form of cultural imperialism has emerged in

this many-faceted world; audience demand the content which is produced in advanced countries, and their local media provides that content to them, becoming an agent for promoting imperial culture. Under UNESCO, an attempt was made to introduce new world information and communication order (NWICO), and an international inquiry commission headed by McBride, et al. (1980) gave recommendations which were ignored by free-flow of information defenders. The end of this chapter hints towards multiculturalism because media content of different countries is now available in advance countries too.

The part fourth comprises of two chapters. The eleventh chapter 'The Media Organization: Pressures and Demands' presents a full picture of media organizations from external and internal observation perspectives. The author illustrates influence brought by each main factor relating to the media organizations regarding news production and its distribution in media organization. Additionally, different professional cultures that make important effect on media-organizational activities are discussed with detailed cases. Furthermore, research methods, main issues and levels of analysis on media organizations are scrutinized and simplified for the understanding of the audience.

Chapter twelve 'The Production Media Culture' pays more attention on balance between internal media workforce and the organizations out of the world. Production convergence as the result of the situation is further explained as 'selecting' and 'processing'. The influence of network connectivity on media structure and content production is also explored at length at the end. The debate concludes on the role played by media model to simplify the media functioning for the understanding of audience.

Part five contains two chapters. The thirteenth chapter as it presents, 'Media Content : Issues, Concepts and Methods of Analysis', scans different approaches of studying media content and methods to media content research from a different perspective. The author mainly concludes three aspects of content analysis: the content as information; content as hidden meaning and 'traditional' quantitative content analysis. The measurement of objectivity debate and question of bias have also been critically

explored. The distinction between message content analysis and structural analysis is explained in-depth at the end of this chapter.

Chapter fourteen, 'Media Genres and Texts' deals with examples of typical media content. The genre is often used for helping media users make their media choices. Therefore, the author describes the concept and research purpose of media genres. The influence of internet on media genre formation is especially put to extensive debate. Accordingly, as the most historical genre, news enjoys a privileged status in public. The discussion on news genres sheds light on the definition, structure, forms of news report, and narrative along with new technological impact. Finally, the cultural text analysis as a new discourse form comes under examination as a diversity of text meanings of different context.

The part six contains two chapters. Chapter fifteen 'Audience Theory and Research Traditions' opens with audience–centered perspective to discuss comprehensive discussions on audience concept, types, theories and research purposes. Therefore, the author explores a framework of analysis audience theory. Similarly, the debate of relations between communicator and audience such as media reach studies and the exploration and analysis of audience activity closes the chapter.

Sixteenth chapter 'Audience Formation and Experience' focuses more on audience diversity and their use of media content. Several media use theories and cases are used to elaborate how subjective and objective conditions stimulate people within the audience to consume specific media content to gratify their motives. The media experience of audience in a social and cultural context along with the changing media forms have been investigated extensively in the closing section of this chapter.

Part seven opens with the introduction of media effects and a debate regarding the disagreement on the degree of effects and measuring them. The media effects has a long history ranging from all powerful media effects, limited effects, combination of powerful and limited effects era, and negotiated media influence which is an audience-centered approach. Then, level of media effects and their kinds are analyzed in the context of media effects

paradigm. Furthermore, difference and impact of planned and unplanned media effects is investigated. The effects debates end with credibility of channel, content quality, and source-receiver relationship in the framework of media effects, besides, campaigns analysis and their effect.

Chapter eighteen, 'Social-Cultural Effects' sheds light on the short-term and long-term media effects both from individual and a collective angle. The violence-saturated content of television and its effect on behaviour have been explored from cultivation analysis framework. The inequality of social distribution from knowledge, social learning theory in the context of children and youth to intended and unintended effects of entertainment content guides the further debate of media effects.

Chapter 'News, Public Opinion and Political Communication' surveys the different media content and various forms of political communication. Furthermore, the author examines the various elements of news learning, framing, difference between media frames and audience frames, media content effects on political, opinions, behaviours and attitudes of the audience. The agenda setting theory familiarizes readers with the relationship between media agenda and public agenda. The priming effect explains how media sets criteria for the evaluation of issues and political leaders in the domain of political communication. The last part of the chapter explores a spiral of silence due to fear of isolation among the individuals along with the elaboration-likelihood model which deals with persuasion. The impact of media on political institutions and democracies, propaganda war in the contemporary era and Internet news impact on the political culture conclude this chapter.

The part 8, Epilogue-'The Future of Mass Communication' summarizes the origins of mass communication during the 1920s and 1930s in an era of industrial development and intense political change. The organization and evolution of mass communication gave rise to communication science. The end of mass communication surveys agreements and disagreements among theorists in the field and reshaping and revision of media research in the context of technological innovations and renewal of

powerful media effects approach. Furthermore, mass communication has not only survived but has also witnessed new trends and innovation in research methods. This book is an authoritative and seminal text on mass communication theory, society and media. It familiarizes students with key theoretical and research paradigms in a reader-friendly manner. However, the book is ethnocentric in nature. The author has cited examples and illustrations mostly from North America and Europe, excluding the other parts of the world; this is one of the major limitations of McQuail's work.

About the Author: Denis McQuail is an Emeritus Professor at The Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam. He is considered to be the most influential theorist in the field of mass communication. He started his career as a lecturer in the Sociology department at the University of Leeds. He is the author of several well-read and leading books in the field of mass communication. The ASCoR has announced Denis McQuail Award in his respect which is awarded to the best article contributing to the development of mass communication theory 2006.