

**Getting out of Debt:
The Communication Begets Communication (CBC) Typology as an
Approach to Theoretical Advancement in the Field**

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A typology rooted in the field’s common object—a communicative act—and the notion that communication begets more communication is presented and evaluated. The organizing power of the typology is illustrated by showing key differences and similarities among existing theories in terms of their communicative dynamics concerning information getting and information giving. The typology’s ability to systematically expand existing theories and increase the theoretical coverage of the field is exemplified by a focus on the spiral of silence and the transportation-imagery model. This article concludes with a discussion of limitations, caveats, and an agenda for theoretical advancement arising from the typology.

Keywords: theoretical advancement, typology, spiral of silence, transportation-imagery model (TIM)

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Communication research continues to flex its explanatory muscle, positing and analyzing processes of influence on outcomes that span the hierarchy of effects. The contexts in which this work takes place are as diverse as the processes being assessed, and the knowledge published in communication journals is becoming increasingly impactful on research conducted outside the field (Zhu & Fu, 2019). As noted by Carbaugh and Buzzanell (2010), "communication data can be generated virtually everywhere" (p. 106), and these data are collected with the goal of "establishing plausible causal mechanisms linking concepts and doing so within and beyond contexts of immediate application" (Cappella & Hornik, 2010, p. 75). In short, "communication science truly has come of age" as a field of study (Bryant & Pribanic-Smith, 2010, p. 34).

As the field "rests at an interesting stage in its maturation process" (DeAndrea & Holbert, 2017, p. 178), there is an opportunity to evaluate the condition of its theoretical advancement. One of the most obvious places to start evaluating the field's theoretical credentials is focusing on bibliometric studies that have tried to outline the most prominent theories in scholarly communication journals. Specifically, in the past 20 years, several bibliometric studies have focused on the prevalence of theories within communication research (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Walter, Cody, & Ball-Rokeach, 2018). Although each study examined a remarkably different sample of scholarly work and operationalized theory in differing ways, two broad conclusions could be drawn. First, traditional theories (e.g., agenda-setting, cultivation theory, dual processing models, framing theory, and uses and gratifications) still hold sway, whereas newer theories find it difficult to gain momentum. As summarized by Walter, Cody, and Ball-Rokeach (2018), who analyzed the entire corpus of research published in the *Journal of Communication* (JoC), "It appears that the two most prominent trends for theory use in JoC are associated with a general increase in theory use, yet a decrease in theory development" (p. 435).

Second, as a big tent discipline "that has invited epistemological, ontological, and methodological differences to dine at the same table" (Zelizer, 2015, p. 413), communication research continues to suffer from an intellectual trade deficit with respect to related disciplines, as we import much more theory than we export (Berger, 1991). As repeatedly illustrated, the most cited theories tend to be imported from neighboring fields, such as anthropology, linguistics, psychology, sociology, political science, and so on, whereas communication theories often gain limited traction and are rarely adopted across the field (e.g., Reeves & Borgman, 1983; Walter, Cody, & Ball-Rokeach, 2018). In light of these circumstances, it is unsurprising that various scholars across the field have repeatedly sounded the alarm about the need to retire key concepts and theories that have limited explanatory value and focus on the advancement of communication theories (e.g., Chaffee & Metzger, 2001; Zelizer, 2015).

Before we put theories under the guillotine, however, it is worth considering that theories can be refined and adapted to continue illuminating processes and effects well beyond their original articulation. In fact, battle-tested theories can serve as prime contenders for theory construction and advancement by remaining open to criticism, trying to disentangle inconsistent findings, and providing alternative explanations (Berger, Roloff, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2010). To this end, Slater and Gleason (2012) identified at least three major ways to advance and refine existing theories: elucidating underlying mechanisms, identifying boundary conditions, and adding new levels of analysis. These approaches to theoretical advancement are not unique to communication research, as most neighboring fields use similar processes to develop and extend theories. Thus, if communication theorists are to remediate the field's current trade deficit, one must ask: What is singular about communication research that may yield new ways to think about theoretical advancement? In other words, although it is

important to continue focusing on underlying mechanisms, boundary conditions, and new levels of analysis as avenues of inquiry, what is needed to help communication theory flourish is a foundation built on that which is strictly and uniquely communication—the communicative act.

An emphasis on communicative acts as the building blocks of communication theory (Chaffee & Berger, 1987) could serve as a unifying approach to theoretical advancement that is grounded in communication and be applied to an array of well-established and emerging questions. In short, communication needs to better leverage its core phenomena in theory building. After outlining evidence about the theoretical state of the field and reviewing common ways in which theories have been advanced in the field of communication, a typology grounded in communicative acts and the notion that communication begets more communication is presented (Chaffee, 1982). Focusing on the two key components of the typology (information getting and information giving), we illustrate the organizational power of the typology to explain the core differences and similarities among existing communication theories. Additionally, using the examples of the spiral of silence (SoS; Noelle-Neumann, 1974) and the transportation-imagery model (TIM; Green & Brock, 2002), we consider how the typology could be used to systematically expand existing theories. We conclude with a discussion of caveats and limitations as well as an agenda for theoretical advancement and outstanding questions arising from the typology.

Three Noncommunication-Centric Approaches to Theoretical Advancement

Social science theory is concerned with explaining phenomena, including how causal relationships take place (Reynolds, 2007), and “at the heart of theories of causal process is the notion of mechanism” (Slater & Gleason, 2012, p. 221). Although it is important to establish an empirical relationship between two constructs, a deeper understanding comes with the ability to elucidate an underlying mechanism and “answer not only whether X affects Y, but also how X exerts its effect on Y” (Hayes, 2018, p. 6). Answering the why and how questions adds valuable insight into the understanding of the phenomena and, as such, can contribute to theory advancement (Baron & Kenny, 1986; but see Berger et al., 2010). To this end, it is unsurprising that top-tier journals in communication and elsewhere often highlight the search for underlying mechanisms as a prime way to contribute to theory and merit publication (e.g., Ahn, Johnson, Krcmar, & Reinecke, 2021). Similarly, when scholars struggle to explain why some effects occur, the explanatory value of a given theory is substantially diminished.

Another way to think of theoretical advancement concerns the identification of boundary conditions. Defined as “the accuracy of theoretical predictions for any context” (Busse, Kach, & Wagner, 2017, p. 580), theories can be refined by delineating cut-off points for their key postulates. Going back to Berelson’s (1948) famous adage suggesting that “some kinds of communication on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people under some kinds of conditions, have some kinds of effects” (as cited in Schramm, 1948, p. 172), it is clear that the search for universal effects across topics, situations, and people is rare, if not misguided (McLeod & Reeves, 1980). Hence, theories often develop by identifying the contingencies of a particular effect or relationship in which the theoretical postulates change. If social scientific theories represent a complex reality in a simplified measure, the focus on boundary conditions helps contextualize predictions, introduce greater nuance, and improve the accuracy of a theory. In parallel to the why question associated with the search for underlying mechanisms, the assessment of boundary

conditions can answer the when question (Baron & Kenny, 1986). From a practical perspective, scholars often search for boundary conditions to explain inconsistent or contradictory findings (Holbert & Park, 2020).

Focusing on additional levels of analysis represents yet another way to think of theoretical advancement. Communication occurs with oneself or with others, in dyads, families, teams, organizations, communities, and societies at large. In contrast to disciplines that focus on a particular level of analysis, communication is a multilevel phenomenon; as such, it examines variables at multiple levels, including micro, meso, and macro (Walter, Ball-Rokeach, Xu, & Broad, 2018). To this end, the field of communication "is likely to benefit from methodological or theoretical innovation from researchers working in those different levels" (Slater & Gleason, 2012, p. 227). This approach to theoretical expansion is best exemplified by theories that are developed at one level (e.g., intrapersonal mechanisms) but then adapted to additional levels (e.g., organizational or societal processes), allowing us to propose a richer theory that can test postulates at different levels of analysis and cross-level linkages. Such multilevel dynamics can be observed across the spectrum of the field from work teams embedded within an organizational culture (e.g., Monge, Heiss, & Margolin, 2008) to media diets that interact with one's social network (e.g., Walter et al., 2018) or community infrastructure (e.g., Burgess, Walter, Ball-Rokeach, & Murphy, 2021) and framing effects (e.g., de Vreese, 2017).

Theoretical Advancement Through the Study of Communicative Acts

Working alongside elucidating mechanisms, identifying boundary conditions, and building multilevel structures, a distinctly "communicative" approach to theory advancement centers on Steven Chaffee's (1982) postulate that "the most likely 'effect' of communication ... is further communication" (p. 72). The notion of communication begetting more communication was articulated well before the formation of the field (see Cooley, 1897; Tarde, 1969) and plays a central role in the field's earliest social science research (see Bryant & Zillmann, 2009; Jowett, Jarvie, Fuller, & Fuller, 1996 for summaries). Communication leading to more communication is evident in the research agendas of many of the field's founders: Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) two-step flow, Lasswell's (1948) concept of feedback, and Lewin's (1947) gatekeeping. Communication-to-communication dynamics are evident in the field's grand theories (e.g., diffusion of innovations; Rogers, 1962), its most influential frameworks (e.g., uses and gratifications; Katz, Haas, & Gurevitch, 1973), and many prominent theories in interpersonal communication (e.g., uncertainty reduction; Berger, 1986), public opinion (e.g., SoS; Noelle-Neumann, 1974), journalism (e.g., agenda building; McCombs, 1992), and media effects (e.g., social learning theory; Bandura, 1977) arenas.

These communicative dynamics also play a central role in the study of such varied phenomena as word-of-mouth advertising (e.g., Kang, Hong, & Hubbard, 2020), political socialization (e.g., Hatemi & Ojeda, 2021), online news discussions (e.g., Weber, 2013; Ziegele, Breiner, & Quiring, 2014), social media network formation (e.g., Maireder, Weeks, Gil de Zúñiga, & Schlögl, 2017), public health campaigns (e.g., Jeong, Tan, Brennan, Gibson, & Hornik, 2015), and corporate decision making (e.g., Snyder & Lee-Partridge, 2013). Although the need to understand how communicative acts influence subsequent communicative acts is certainly implied across a wide range of communication subfields, such dynamics rarely take center stage when theoretical advancement is involved. This gap is somewhat perplexing, since the focus on communication both as a predictor and as an outcome uniquely encompasses the essence of communication research.

From the most mundane and routine to the most complex and situated, communication research is at its core the study of communicative acts. As the “molecules” that constitute communication processes, communicative acts are the basic ingredients of popular models (e.g., Schramm, 1954; Shannon & Weaver, 1949), theories (e.g., McLeod & Chaffee, 1973), as well as key definitions of communication itself (e.g., Mead, 1934; Ogden & Richards, 1923). In the “simplest possible communicative act, one person (A) transmits information to another person (B) about something (X)” (Newcomb, 1953, p. 393), and as such, communicative acts enable individuals to maintain a simultaneous orientation toward one another and/or toward other objects.

Newcomb’s (1953) social psychological definition of communicative acts is mainly concerned with communicative acts as the building blocks of intragroup interactions, whereas Chaffee (1982) introduced further nuance by focusing on “what people do [with information] rather than their orientation toward channels” (p. 71). As such, Chaffee (1982) shifted the focus from general statements about communication behavior to a more direct assessment of different types of communicative acts, including getting and giving information. Although the former is concerned with activities such as being exposed to, obtaining, selecting, verifying, and searching for information, the latter involves the conveying and sharing of information with others.

The Communication Begets Communication Typology

Information getting and giving can be viewed as key communicative acts comprising communication-to-communication dynamics. As such, one can conceive of a two-by-two Communication Begets Communication (CBC) typology based on different combinations of communicative acts that serve as predictors and outcomes (see Figure 1). A theory’s placement within the typology indicates the specific communication-to-communication process that anchors that theory most prominently to the field.

Communicative act as an outcome			
		<i>Information getting</i>	<i>Information giving</i>
Communicative act as a predictor	<i>Information getting</i>	General aggression model	Two-step flow
	<i>Information giving</i>	Information manipulation theory	Media richness theory

Figure 1. Communication begets communication typology.

Starting from the top left corner of Figure 1, although the general aggression model's (GAM) main focus is on how personal and situational variables lead to aggressive behavior, its cyclic nature also suggests that positive reinforcement after exposure to violent media is a likely predictor of subsequent exposure to violent media (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). From a communicative acts perspective, the GAM model serves as an example of how information getting (i.e., exposure to violent media) leads to information giving (i.e., exposure to more violent media). Likewise, a focus on how information getting leads to further information getting can be found in the uncertainty reduction theory (URT; Berger, 1986), which emerged to explain how failure to gain adequate information about the behavior of others leads to direct communication to reduce uncertainty. As such, the theory conceives that (failed) attempts at information getting will result in further information getting, at least in the case of active or interactive strategies to reduce uncertainty (Berger, 1986).

Moreover, some of the most canonical theories in communication focus on how information getting predicts information giving. For instance, the two-step flow insight from the Lazarsfeld studies indicates that opinion leaders first retrieve information from mass media and later give it to others who are in their networks of association (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Similarly, intermedia agenda-setting is widely used to explain how and when content transfers between news media. An evolution of agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the primary focus of intermedia agenda-setting is understanding how news content transfers between different media outlets (Harder, Sevenans, & Van Aelst, 2017). Intermedia agenda-setting could therefore represent processes where information getting (e.g., receiving salience cues from news media sources) exerts influence on information giving (providing salience cues to other news media sources).

Shifting focus to theories that include key postulates, which indicate information giving as a predictor, information manipulation theory (IMT; McCornack, 1992) is an example of how information giving influences information getting. In essence, this theory focuses on how the sender chooses to highlight, omit, alter, or falsify information to deceive or to create a false impression and on how the receiver, in turn, perceives the message. A somewhat parallel communicative dynamic is represented by politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1978), which highlights strategies that support or negate face in multiple contexts. Accordingly, in most cases, facework is an outcome of earlier information giving, which leads to information getting that supports positive or negative faces. Hence, the theory can explain how information giving leads to information getting.

Moreover, a refinement of media richness theory (MRT; Daft & Lengel, 1986) known as media compensation theory (Hantula, Kock, D'Arcy, & DeRosa, 2011) argues that humans adapt to the limitations and affordances of richer and leaner media by using compensatory principles. As such, information giving leads to more information giving to compensate for the limitations of particular media channels. Other theories, such as the social information theory of emotions, posit that one of the functional purposes of expressing emotions is to gain influence in subsequent interactions, including negotiations and conflicts (e.g., Van Kleef, Van Doorn, Heerdink, & Koning, 2011). Although this theory leaves open whether the expression of discrete emotions, such as anger, increases or decreases social influence, it highlights how information giving in the form of emotional content exerts an influence on subsequent information giving.

The present typology has several advantages. First, this typology places the communicative aspects of theories front and center. Other fields are less likely to treat communication as primary in the questions they ask, even when employing similar theories. Second, some cells in the typology (e.g., information getting as a predictor and information giving as an outcome) are very easy to populate since this particular dynamic is at the heart of numerous theories in communication (e.g., two-step model, SoS), whereas theories that occupy some of the other cells (e.g., information giving as a predictor and information giving as an outcome) are much more difficult to supply. This imbalance may speak to a broader potential concern within the field, wherein some aspects of communication receive an excess of theoretical attention, whereas others remain undertheorized (Thayer, 1963). Third, the typology is useful precisely because the boundaries between the cells are not mutable, allowing the same theory to occupy multiple places in the typology. Thus, the typology not only provides a parsimonious mapping of different theories in communication research but also offers a starting point for theoretical expansion along the continua of communicative acts as predictors and as outcomes. Finally, this typology allows for an easy expansion along some relevant dimensions, including the incorporation of additional communicative acts, such as information exchange (the give-and-take of information; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001), the temporality of communicative acts (e.g., short term vs. long term), and the nature of communicative agents (e.g., human vs. algorithmic).

The organizational power of this typology, through its emphasis on the flow of information between communicative acts, allows us to see past the exterior trappings of these variables such that similar or related theories of communication-begetting-communication can be organized into a coherent grid according to the dynamics at play. Once this mapping has been achieved, the development of one theory can guide the expansion of others with similar information dynamics by identifying analogous processes. This, in addition to the opportunities for systematic expansion inherent in the typology, can create guideposts for theoretical advancement that consider the totality of communicative processes. In the following section, this potential is illustrated through two key theories from different subfields of communication research: the SoS (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) and the TIM (Green & Brock, 2002).

Two Examples to Illustrate the Potential of the CBC Typology

The Spiral of Silence

The SoS is an interesting case study to examine the utility of the proposed typology, not only because of its popularity (Walter, Cody, & Ball-Rokeach, 2018) and the historical role it played in the maturation of the media effects discipline but also because of criticism about its applicability and generalizability (Scheufele & Moy, 2000). The theory has an explicit emphasis on the power of media, as it is based on the assumption that "mass media are part of the system which the individual uses to gain information about the environment" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, p. 50), and it posits processes of influence that involve both mediated and interpersonal communication. The theory posits that when individuals perceive their opinion to represent the majority, they will be more likely to share it with others. Conversely, owing to the fear of social isolation as a generative mechanism, individuals will be more likely to withhold their opinions if they consider it to align with the minority. From its original articulation as a theory that explained the public-opinion dynamics of the 1965 West German elections (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), the theory has evolved and expanded by proposing many underlying mechanisms (e.g., Matthes, 2015),

boundary conditions (e.g., Gearhart & Zhang, 2018), and multilevel, or cross-cultural, comparisons (e.g., Huang, 2005).

In terms of its theoretical expansion, however, much less attention has been paid to enhancing the explanatory power of the communicative aspects of the theory. Namely, the theory was originally articulated to explain how information getting (i.e., consumption of news) influences information giving (i.e., intent to voice an opinion based on whether perceived to be in the minority or the majority). Nearly half a century after its publication, SoS research still focuses on this single communication begets communication dynamic. Although SoS mainly occupies one cell in the proposed typology (see Kwon, Stefanone, & Barnett, 2014), one can envision its further expansion to the remaining areas of the CBC typology:

Information Getting to Information Getting

The ability to understand how the quality, consistency, and diligence of one's gauging of public-opinion influence subsequent communication can help shed light on questions central to the SoS. For instance, an individual is exposed to a news program where immigration reform is being discussed, and an opinion poll indicates where people stand on this reform. The question of what happens next is a critical, albeit underexplored, area within the SoS. Namely, one may choose to go to other sources to see if they can confirm this polling finding. Noelle-Neumann (1974) details how humans use a quasistatistical organ that is constantly gauging public opinion, and this organ may spark a series of information-getting-to-information-getting dynamics as an individual seeks to make quality judgments about what stances are in the majority versus the minority. Importantly, this line of inquiry may help address one of the central criticisms of the SoS by providing a more nuanced account of how different cues about opinion distribution interact with each other (Glynn & Park, 1997).

Information Getting to Information Giving

This CBC dynamic can be viewed as the anchor of SoS theoretical expansion since it comes closest to the original articulation of the theory. According to this account, individuals gauge the opinion climate from exposure to mass media (information getting) and then decide whether or how to voice their opinion on a particular issue (information giving), "responding with alacrity, or with acquiescence, or with silence" (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, p. 51).

Information Giving to Information Getting

Because the SoS literature overwhelmingly relies on correlational data and the observed relationships between perceptions of public-opinion support and political-opinion expression tend to be weak (for a meta-analysis, see Matthes, Knoll, & von Sikorski, 2018), it is important to understand how voicing one's opinion may influence further exposure to media. In essence, in this theoretical strand, the SoS can be studied as a reversed process whereby discussion with others may shape distinct media repertoires, further cementing or challenging public opinion. Understandably, the mass media context in which the SoS was originally formulated made such questions less pertinent; however, today's fragmented media system provides a unique opportunity to examine whether the SoS could also be reversed. Put differently, does

exposure to opinions lead individuals to seek the larger public-opinion context within which that statement was offered? Filling this theoretical deficit could help address common criticism about the explanatory power of the SoS and its limited ability to determine the causal ordering of key constructs (e.g., Salmon & Kline, 1985).

Information Giving to Information Giving

Another potentially fruitful set of theoretical questions could zero in on the placement of fear of isolation within the spiral (Matthes, Rios Morrison, & Schemer, 2010). This line of inquiry can revisit a core tenet of the theory and the shape of the spiral itself. The idea that the fear of social isolation, which traditionally stands at the beginning of the theoretical model, is itself a construct affected by previous experiences with visible public opinion warrants further exploration. Indeed, considering the fact that there are considerable variations in collective levels of fear of social isolation across cultures (e.g., Huang, 2005) and across topics (e.g., Gearhart & Zhang, 2018) lends some credence to this line of theoretical expansion. Moreover, this strand of research can directly contribute to the deficit in conceptualization and empirical evidence surrounding the concepts of hardcore and avant-garde, representing those groups that are “not prepared to conform, to change their opinions, or even to be silent in the face of public opinion” (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, pp. 48–49). In this manner, focus on the potential communicative antecedents of fear of isolation stands to directly contribute to an ongoing debate about the nature of fear of isolation, with some considering it to be an exogenous, almost trait-based variable (Hayes, Matthes, & Eveland, 2013), whereas others see it as a communicative outcome affected by past experiences of opinion expressions by some and the silence of others.

The Transportation-Imagery Model

The second example used to illustrate the potential benefit of the CBC typology is the TIM (Green & Brock, 2002). Although the theoretical roots of the model are in social psychology (it was first published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and draws inspiration from other prominent works in psychology; e.g., Brock, 1967; Bruner, 1986; Gerrig, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), it has become widely popular in communication and various other fields. Thus, it presents an opportunity to showcase the benefits of the CBC typology in the context of a nonnative theory. Unlike the SoS, where communicative acts are inherent to the theory’s central postulates, the TIM is mainly concerned with intrapersonal processes that involve imagery, affect, and attentional focus (Green & Brock, 2000). Ostensibly, this would suggest that this particular theory would not easily map onto the proposed typology; however, as the following examples illustrate, the proposed typology can enhance theories or models that focus on intrapersonal communication.

Acknowledging that storytelling is a fundamental mode of thinking that has been used for millennia to share information (Bruner, 1991), change beliefs, and inspire action, the TIM suggests that engaging, transporting stories are well positioned to convey complex or value-laden information because of their ability to reduce counterarguments through mental simulation of unknown, difficult, or frightening situations; provide role models for behavior change; and cultivate strong attitudes that are grounded in both cognition and emotion (Green, 2006). Hence, according to this theoretical approach, there is a trade-off between the

cognitive and emotional involvement required to process the narrative and people's ability or willingness to counterargue against it, which benefits persuasion.

Keeping in mind the empirical attention received by the TIM, it is unsurprising that it has already been extended in a several ways. Echoing the approach to theoretical development evidenced in the SoS literature, numerous studies have focused on crystalizing the underlying mechanisms of transportation (e.g., Nabi & Green, 2015; Walter, Bilandzic, Schwarz, & Brooks, 2021), its boundary conditions (e.g., Appel & Richter, 2010; Green et al., 2008), or providing a multilevel perspective (with a particular focus on coviewing; Tal-Or, 2021). Although such expansions provide a plethora of relevant insights, the TIM could also benefit from a closer focus on the interplay between exposure to narratives and other communicative acts, as outlined in the following examples.

Information Getting to Information Getting

Broadly speaking, the TIM deals with the effects of exposure to narratives on various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral outcomes. Thus, it stands to reason that the model could benefit from an explicit focus on how exposure to certain narratives predicts further selection of content. Although not explicitly derived from the TIM, studies have shown how exposure to entertainment education in the form of a teen drama can predict further selection of issue-relevant transmedia content (Wang & Singhal, 2016), potentially echoing the influence of the original stories. Hence, these types of insights could enrich the model by examining narrative exposure not merely as a predictor but also as an outcome of involvement with stories.

Information Getting to Information Giving

Some of the earliest works on the persuasive influence of narratives used information-giving indicators, such as writing a letter (e.g., Papa et al., 2000) or calling a relevant hotline (e.g., Kennedy, O'Leary, Beck, Pollard, & Simpson, 2004), in response to a particular program as evidence of impact. Similar types of questions are rarely addressed in the context of TIM, leaving many of these dynamics unexplored. For example, it would be interesting to see whether cognitive or emotional involvement with the narrative or its characters can predict attempts by the audience to disclose information about their personal experience/identity with others. Little is currently known about the specific narrative features that can stimulate information giving behaviors.

Information Giving to Information Getting

Another key, though understudied, consideration within TIM has to do with narrative selections. This interplay between information giving and getting seems particularly pertinent, given how the consumption of narratives occurs on social media (e.g., Sharma, Zhang, & Liu, 2022). For instance, this line of theoretical expansion of the TIM could focus on the question of how different search queries on social media platforms influence exposure to new narratives on social media (Trielli & Diakopoulos, 2019). In this way, information giving behaviors may influence cognitive and emotional involvement by helping to curate a particular narrative diet.

Information Giving to Information Giving

Although the TIM has traditionally focused on narrative-consistent changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior as indicators of influence, there is a growing understanding that willingness to share stories with others may be another important outcome. For instance, the question of whether sharing narratives concerning one's personal experiences incentivizes others to share similar stories could contribute to existing knowledge about the TIM. Interestingly, there is evidence that exposure to emotional narratives increases social sharing of personal narratives over time (Curci & Bellelli, 2004), yet it is unclear whether specific narrative features or the degree of transportation into the narrative world plays any role in such effects.

As the examples from the SoS and TIM illustrate, the CBC typology opens the door to multiple directions of theoretical expansion by examining relevant communication begets communication dynamics. Although each type of communicative act offers a set of new or undertheorized questions, it is not intended to materially alter the purpose of the theory—in fact, the dependent variables in each theory (e.g., willingness to self-censor, adoption of narrative-consistent attitudes) can remain unchanged. However, there can be a substantial increase in the number of communication processes to be studied, leading to these outcomes of interest.

Discussion

Sixty years ago, Lee Thayer (1963) was tasked with preparing a talk with the provocative title: "Is communication here to stay?" Rather than answering the question directly, he spent the bulk of the talk addressing the challenges of theoretical advancement in communication research, suggesting that the survival of a field of inquiry is intimately linked to its theoretical activity. Simply put, a field of scientific inquiry will stagnate without theoretical activity that clears the fog of incoherence by giving meaning to existing findings and setting the stage for new questions. Although the general increase in theory use indicated by prior studies is laudable (e.g., Walter, Cody, & Ball-Rokeach, 2018), the dominance of older theoretical paradigms signals a missed opportunity to reinvigorate the field of communication in response to changes in the landscape of media and society in the 21st century. At its core, the CBC typology presents a step toward averting theoretical stagnation by offering a systematic approach to theoretical advancement based on the field's common object—namely, the communicative act.

Among the key obstacles to theoretical advancement in the field of communication, researchers highlight the "tendency to emphasize some aspect of the phenomenon we are studying ... and simultaneously to neglect or ignore other, perhaps equally or more, important aspects of that phenomenon" (Thayer, 1963, p. 230). To a degree, the rooting of many theories in a primary CBC type (e.g., information getting to information giving) tends to perpetuate dominant paradigms, leading to the propagation of discipline-specific approaches at the expense of new applications. Thus, although the previously identified approaches to theory development (i.e., underlying mechanisms, boundary conditions, and levels of analysis) can deepen our understanding of specific communicative acts, they effectively answer the same questions in new contexts. Conversely, the proposed typology returns the question to the study of communication: by focusing on the interrelation between relevant communicative acts, theory can better accommodate the inherent complexity of communication phenomena.

Theory guides the questions that scholars ask. However, important questions may be overlooked as theoretical inertia drives scholarly conversation. Through active engagement with the CBC typology, scholars may derive new questions to illuminate the unplumbed depths of human communication research. After all, the state of the field of communication is related to its heuristic provocativeness and its ability to study and understand as many aspects of the phenomenon as possible. From this perspective, there is great value in a comprehensive typology of theoretical expansion since it almost makes certain that scholars will always be able to draw new ideas from the well of communicative acts.

Even within the context of the proposed theoretical extensions in this article, however, it is evident that expansion into some CBC types is easier to conceive than others and, thus, may require concerted effort to maximize its explanatory potential. Nonetheless, this pursuit is worthwhile because the difficulty of thinking about certain CBC types within a particular context implies exploring new theoretical grounds. Theory building is not meant to be a safe endeavor, and the CBC typology could be used as a general navigational guide to help reduce the anxieties and uncertainties that come with charting new paths of inquiry.

Furthermore, the typology provides organizational power and, potentially, an organizing principle for the field as a whole. As the study of communication becomes increasingly disparate, accounting for both the unique qualities of distinct channels (interpersonal, mediated-interpersonal, and mass-mediated) contexts (e.g., political communication, health communication, family communication), and epistemologies (e.g., critical, cultural, rhetorical, postpositivistic), existing theory can be reconceptualized through this lens to reveal relationships between seemingly unrelated communication phenomena and provide a more expansive vision of communication. Although the notion and utility of “theory is borne out differently across disciplinary environments” (Zelizer, 2015, p. 412), virtually every subfield of communication focuses on communicative acts and, as such, could benefit from the adoption of the CBC typology, as illustrated by the various theories in Figure 1.

There are some limitations to the current formulation of the typology, the first of which is that its conclusions were derived solely from a review of quantitative, postpositivistic research, as it most closely aligns with the epistemological approach chosen by the authors. It is important to note, however, that the CBC typology does not privilege one type of approach above another, as communication begets communication dynamics are also inherent in critical (e.g., Noble, 2018), cultural (e.g., Morley, 1980), and rhetorical (e.g., Fisher, 1987) studies. Additionally, the dynamics that connect any two communicative acts are likely more complicated or nuanced than can be fully captured in the present typology. The CBC typology offers a framework for conceptualizing new relationships between communicative acts in pursuit of theoretical expansion, but many lines of research would be well served to offer additional nuance to these processes (while never losing sight of the core CBC dynamics that define a particular research agenda).

It is important to emphasize that we are not advocating the dismissal of traditional approaches to theory development and expansion. Far from it—such approaches are useful and relevant when attempting to provide further understanding of communication processes and their effects. Yet, given the multiparadigmatic identity of the field, as well as the omnifarious and ever-changing nature of human communication (Zelizer, 2015), it might be productive to think of theoretical development and advancement

“not as a search for the truth, but as more of a search for comprehensiveness stemming from different worldviews” (Gioia & Pitre, 1990, p. 587). Hence, to the extent that the CBC typology will have any polemic or heuristic value in bringing out different worldviews, it will make an important contribution to increasing the commerce of discussions about theory among various subareas in the field.

In sum, although this typology was conceived within the field of communication and largely contextualized within its confines, it is also intended as an offering to the many fields that have inspired the study of communication-related phenomena. Much as communication has drawn from other disciplines to develop many of its foundational theories (Rogers, 1997), we hope that this typology may help inspire their theoretical expansion. Grounded in the most essential element of the field—the communicative act—the typology is uniquely a product of communication study but might be extrapolated to any field that cohabits similar theoretical terrains or considers the transfer of information within its purview. In the same way that the CBC typology provides an organizing principle for the study of communication, it might also be repayment in kind to the fields from which communication has borrowed—and a first step toward getting out of debt.

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