

*Persuasion Theories*, the first in this historical sequence, are characterized by direct and unmediated effects, typically based on persuasion and audience modeling of observed behavior. The seminal books and papers in this group span the interval 1944–1963. The study of political campaign effects, propaganda campaigns, attitude change, and social modeling of observed representations of behavior in the mass media especially among children characterizes these traditions of research. Shannon’s information theory approach focused on the transmission of information rather than persuasion and up until the mid-1960s was viewed by some as a fundamental scientific basis for the social scientific as well as an engineering analysis of communication processes (Berlo, 1960; Schramm, 1955; Smith, 1966). Lasswell’s “Who Says What to Whom With What Effect” and institutional/cultural level models of the function of communication for society are included here as well.

The second stage, which with nine subtheories is the largest cluster, is labeled *Active Audience Theories* with seminal studies published from 1944 to 1986. Like the preceding cluster of persuasion theories, the basic hypotheses here posit direct transmission of messages to atomized individuals. These theories do not pay particular attention to the individual’s position in social structure or social organization. What distinguishes this cluster is a variety of propositions about the motivations and psychological orientations of audience members—thus the “active” audience (Bauer, 1964). In some cases these psychological orientations are likely to lessen an informational or persuasive effect (as in minimal effects and selective exposure); in other cases these orientations will reinforce and strengthen potential effects, such as in the case of parasocial and disposition theory. ELM theory (elaboration likelihood model) is located here rather than in the persuasion cluster because the hypothesized central route of cognitive processing emphasizes active evaluation and deliberation in response to a potentially persuasive message.

The third stage—*Social Context Theories*—focuses more heavily on situated social contexts and how individuals perceive messages to be influencing others in their social sphere. The seminal publications for this cluster span 1955–1983. The two-step and related multistep flow subtheories, for example, draw attention to the social embeddedness of sense-making as individuals rely on social cues and interpersonal conversation to interpret and contextualize complex media messages. Because of these theoretical interests, entirely different research and sampling techniques are often required instead of, or in addition to, traditional experimental and survey designs. Diffusion and knowledge gap theories trace rates of penetration of new ideas, opinions, and behaviors over time and among different social strata. Spiral-of-silence