

# Environmental Dynamo: A Multi-Layered Approach to Mass Communication Theory Development in a Multi-Faceted Society

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## Abstract

Emerging changes in technological and other spheres resulting in democratization of the mass media have dwindled linearity in communication and previous addiction to the traditional media. This shift has generated multiple changes and renegotiations of media contents and their effects on the audience. Other environmental constructs, including diverse cultures, psychology and political influences, and ideological propagations, have also emerged to further alter the status quo. This development is mostly traced but not limited to the revolutionary impacts of the internet, which has brought diversification and unpredictability into consumers' media choices. It has become increasingly impossible to prognosticate which medium attracts the most consistent audience—and to what effect. This study examined three media-effects theories with receding and questionable relevance, and also investigated the perception of communication students and scholars on the alternatives. Those interrogated are the Hypodermic Needle, Framing, and Cultivation theories. Anchored on the quantitative research method, the study adopted purposive sampling technique in data collection from 670 respondents from selected universities across Nigeria. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed a hunger for a communication theory that connects and blends the traditional with the digital eras through unambiguous harmonization of emerging human, environmental, sociological, psychological and institutional variables. The outcome is the Environmental Dynamo Media Theory—a cross-breed of neutralized variant influences. The study makes a demand for further examination of other media-effects theories whose conceptual values and operationalization are challenged by contemporary realities.

**Keywords:** Environmental Variables, Media Contents, Media Effects, Media Theory, Two-Step Flow

## Introduction

Time and technology have turned previous grandeur human ideas and innovations into rotten intellectual wares. Celebrated inventions, proclaiming extraordinary human brilliance, are already overshadowed by emerging technologies. In the communication field, internet technology has invented the new media, while certain cultural and social dynamics in different societies have introduced changes in contents, accessibility and reactions to information. Digital media grant consumers wider opportunities and control of the creation and consumption of media contents, states Odisha State Open University (OSOU, 2017).

A shocking scenario unfolded in 2011 at the Conference of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC). As academics rubbed minds on crucial issues, someone demanded loudly, “we need to declare a moratorium on framing research.” As everyone, in silence, got curious about such an audacious outburst, he added that there were surplus framing papers in circulation, “many of which should not even be considered (as) framing research.” Kim (2019, p.12) said the impulsive sentiment drew instant support from other researchers. Kim conceded to the crusader that framing, a media effects theory, has been overrated, and perhaps, deserves a place in a research morgue.

This study empirically interrogates the relevance of three media-effects theories—framing, hypodermic needle, and cultivation—based on the assumption that peoples’ attitudes are shaped by consistent exposure to certain media contents. It is believed that at birth, these theories were functionally attractive and effective. Cacciatore et al. (2015, p.153) confirm that as a theoretical construct, framing attracted popularity in different areas of research until certain ambiguities bordering on “how we conceptualize and therefore operationalize framing” made it “to overlap with other media effects models” resulting in its dysfunctionality.

Harrold Lasswell’s hypodermic needle concept is the most audacious of all media-effects theories. It functioned maximally because of the circumstances of its birth; between the First and Second World Wars—an era characterized by heavy propaganda with little or no media variety. Chantai (2021), cited by Okocha and Akpe (2022), observed that with a captive audience, it was cheap for the theory to orchestrate its relevance until things assumed different dimensions with emerging environmental variables, which ended the perceived docility of the audiences.

The cultivation theory postulates that consistent exposure to certain television programmes leads to audiences developing and retaining attitudes displayed in such programmes. Described as sociocultural-based theory, Gerbner and Gross (1976) see television-transmitted contents as capable of shaping the audiences’ beliefs, and behaviours.

Experts on epistemology of media effects have argued for and against the wide assumptions of these theories. Alalawi (2015) asserts that mass media effects are direct, not mediated; describing anything to the contrary as serious misconception. His conclusion challenges Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz’s two-step flow theory in their 1955 book, *Personal Influence*. Their findings are emphatic that most media consumers are “indirectly influenced and informed by the media through opinion leaders” (OSOU, 2017, p.13). That means messages conveyed are not directly absorbed by the audience until they are interpreted by the opinion leaders; especially in countries where access to the mass media remains an elitist exclusivity. None of the three theories analysed in this study considered this peculiarity at the time they were propounded.

Opinion leaders are great influencers upon which the masses rely for information as they are capable of persuading others to change their beliefs on issues (OSOU, 2017). Within their environment, they are pivots of interpersonal communication network based on their credibility and trustworthiness. Weissman et al. (2020) call them role models that are accepted and trusted as mediating forces between the mass media and the audience.

These research findings have ignited the need for an empirically-tested media theory which accommodates dominant catalytic variables with influence on communication now and in the future. These researchers are therefore proposing a new theory to remedy the limitations of the aforementioned theories. It is called the Environmental Dynamo Media Theory. Global in content and application, it is contextually African, and aims at closing identified gaps in framing, cultivation and hypodermic needle theories. This study seeks to establish the need for such a new communication theory by scrutinizing analytical flaws in the existing media-effects theories.

## **Objectives**

Reasons for carrying out this study have been identified and outlined for analysis as follows:

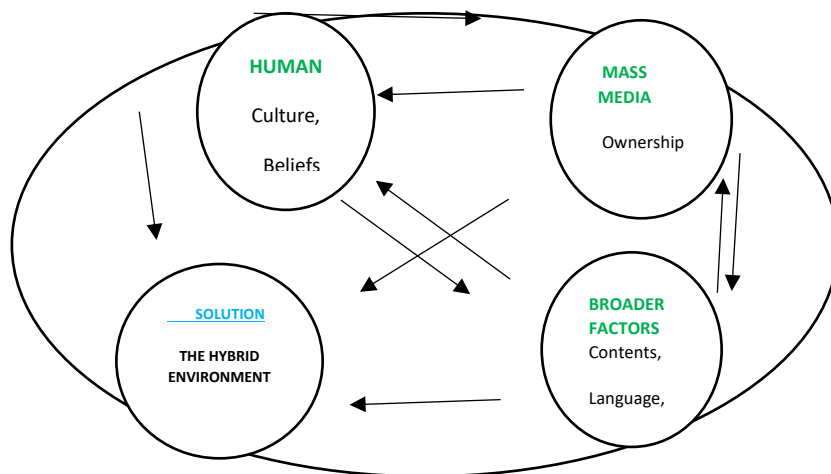
1. To examine the assumptions and limitations of the selected theories
2. To explain the significance of the proposed Environmental Dynamo Media Theory
3. To investigate public perceptions of the new theory

### Conceptual clarifications: theory and model

In communication field, the emergence of media-effects theories added contextual values to media discourse and further research. Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2018, p.1) define them as assembly of ideas that create understanding of “the pattern, nature or outcome of a communication process or activity.” Adding, OSOU (2017), says media theories formulate propositions that not only explain media usage and effects on mankind; but also, specifically, explain the impacts of communication contents. Difficulties in defining what it is (Sutton & Staw, 1995), account for non-development of acceptable theories in the behavioural sciences. Gelso (2008) defines a theory as a combination of different constructs with descriptive ability, integration and explanatory power. A theory connotes the description of a phenomenon plus the interactions of variables that predict certain outcomes. Captured in **Figure 1** are empirically-tested factors that determine media effects on the audience.

However, there is yet no universally agreed pattern for constructing a theory, state Corley and Gioia (2011); and Dankasa (2015); because different scholars keep suggesting different approaches. However, a theory has to be logical enough to smoothen a research process. Wacker (2004) and Dankasa (2015) suggest that a communication theory should conservatively stand the test of time and should only be substituted with a superior one.

Constructing a strong theory starts with a model. This is an illustration that presents in tangible form, what a theory is—a bridge that connects the abstract with reality. Simply, a model is the graphical content of a theory. Shoemaker et al. (2004), cited by Thomas (2017, p.232), call it an academic tool which facilitates a theoretical construction, and comes in the form of “a written or graphic representation of a theory or one of its components.” Fried (2020, p.336) says it connotes “instantiation of theories,” by offering “a more local description or understanding of a phenomenon.”



**Figure 1. Conceptual Model of the Environmental Dynamo Media Theory**

Captured in our proposed Environmental Dynamo Media Theory model are three interconnected environments comprising variables with capacities to catalytically alter message contents and effects. They are grouped under human, media and broader environments. Broader factors comprise diversified issues operating outside the human and media environments. Antoniu and Daniel (1983) cited by Ristea (2013) agree that human behaviours are strongly propelled by a series of mediating factors, and that reactions can

be resisted or accommodated because individuals have control over them. Ristea believes that physical manifestation of a person's behavior cannot be separated from environmental influences.

The thematic construct of this theory, as graphically demonstrated, is to awaken scholarly consciousness to the fact that every media message has concrete non-circumventing walls to contend with. These factors determine the mold and shape of media contents.

In the capitalist Europe and the United States, media ownership is mainly private or corporate while in the authoritarian China and North Korea, ownership is mainly by the state (Sjovaag & Ohlsson, 2019). Altschull (1997) agrees that media contents are constructed to principally reflect the ideals of owners. It therefore becomes impossible to build contents that will extract predictable reactions from the audience, because media contents are defined more by the system than the sponsors. A study of Indonesian media (Ekayanti & Xiaoming, 2017, p.1326) indicates that though ownership may not directly affect professional values in journalism, "it can affect such a practice indirectly through interventional practices in the newsroom," meaning that political interest determines editorial contents.

At the initiation of the scrutinized media theories, the mass media were strictly controlled by the ruling class. Al-Hasani (2008) citing Mowlana (1977) and Al-Shamari (1989) observes that in the less-democratic countries in Africa and Arab world, the influence of political, and intellectual elites dominated the structure and function of the mass media; an atmosphere that guaranteed reasonable predictability of media contents. Today, with democratised ownership, the contents are diverse.

In Malaysia, certain cultural diversities namely religion, history or tradition, are against some categories of media contents. The system demands that every advertisement must adhere to 1996 advertising code issued by the Ministry of Information; which does not permit contents that offend the religious taste or political susceptibilities of the people (Waller & Fam, 2000, p. 13). The code "is heavily influenced by Islamic values" and is against issues that contradict such values.

The second eco-system in the model, highlights broader factors, comprising some elements that shape news' packaging, preferences and effects. It shows how globalization concept determines media contents and impacts. With digital technology, the audience is now bombarded with different versions of the same story, interpreted and packaged in different formats and transmitted from different platforms across the world. Blackson (2008) establishes that certain African beliefs and perceptions are greatly influenced by international media organizations. Gul and Dar (2020) report that in India, with digital communication, traditional music and culture have been the greatest casualties having been replaced with contrary media contents.

Unrestrained access to global media has broken limitations in media contents across continents. Uche (1991) recalled how young Nigerians once formed the Voice of America Listeners Club, an indication of the impacts of foreign media on their attitudes. He mentioned cases where French-speaking Gabon-based Africa's Number One Radio Station would rather broadcast French Premier League soccer match commentaries instead of that of African teams; and also relayed other programmes from Radio France International to Africans. Contents of such programmes likely influenced reactions of Africans to local media contents. Eko (2003) confirms that Africa is flooded with strange philosophies and worldviews through the mass media.

Then comes the massive Chinese media presence in Africa which has forced a country like Togo to have Chinese programmes translated into local languages (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2018). Obviously, Chinese have significantly influenced the local mass media contents with their home-made ideology on consumers' ethical expectations of media roles in the society (Mosher & Farah, 2010).

In addition, there is what is called mediated public diplomacy, exported alongside mass media contents, aimed at increasing African support for some Chinese foreign policies (Entman, 2008). Wasserman and

Madrid-Morales (2018) confirm that through direct exposure to deliberate media contents, favourable perceptions are generated among Africans towards Chinese's foreign policies.

Findings captured in these scenarios loudly connote that media contents and impacts are determined more by exposure and response to unrestrained external factors than the predictions of message sponsors. With digital technology, foreign media contents compete for attention with local news. This immediately raises the concrete walls of limited effects, which means that media messages, whether framed or injected, can no longer achieve pre-determined impacts because they are mitigated by some arbitrating variables—foreign culture, diplomacy, among others.

The human environment in the above model comprises reaction-mediating forces capable of invalidating the orchestrated direct media effect philosophy based on the deception that audiences are helplessly receptive of every media content. Studies show that humans receive and also participate in the media content process. Pereze-Seijo et al. (2020) state that internet serves as feedback mechanism between media operators and users, thus enriching journalistic contents. Across Africa, broadcast stations invite audience participation through phone calls and new media platforms (Srinivasin & Lopes, 2018). This confirms Ayo-Obiremi and Adelabu's (2020) view that the era of inactive mass media consumers no longer exists, as media users now participate in content generation.

Religion also significantly influences media consumers' behavior and the ultimate effects of media contents. In Australia, Muslims are extremely critical of media coverage of Islamic activities; believing that Islam is always negatively depicted in the media (Hassan et al., 2021). This implies that reactions of Islamic audience to media contents in Australia is unpredictable. In the predominant Islamic Turkey, advertisements on addictive products which include cigarettes and alcohol are not allowed. Also, news and advertisements about underwear, condoms, female contraceptives and hygiene products generate repulsive reactions. Islamic faithful believe that such information creates thoughts of nudity "which are against the Islamic teachings" (Fam et al., 2021, p.494).

These demonstrate that no media content attracts predictable impact except it falls within the socio-cultural milieu of consumers, because certain environmental barricades shield media consumers against becoming dumping grounds for prohibited media contents. Several intervening human elements, including alternative news avenues, combine to create deflective barriers or permissible atmospheres for information to permeate.

Culture is equally a determining factor in the consumption and reaction to media contents. Andrade (1992), cited by Cronk (2017) believes that people react to situations because of their culture. For example, news on homosexuality is culturally acceptable to the Americans and some Europeans, but not Africans who see it as evil, because it does not align with their culture. Reports on a study in Malawi indicates that 80% of the respondents described homosexuality as ungodly (Hairsine, 2019), and that in 2019, Zambia, Uganda and Nigeria led other African countries in the fight against same-sex marriage. Kire and Kumar (2017, p.1177) confirm that culture influences media consumers' attitudes describing its impact as "automatic and almost invisible." Culture determines how people communicate, interpret and evaluate media contents.

Habits developed from media consumption are mainly determined by credibility and proximity of the source (Mishra and Bakshi, 2018). Zhou (2021) reveals that in China where COVID-19 originated, people who suffered earlier casualties took media information about the pandemic more seriously than those without such early experiences. During the outbreak of Ebola virus in 2014, Nigerians reacted with deep interest to media information on the disease after the death of a consultant endocrinologist who treated a Liberian-American patient, in Lagos; despite the fact that Ebola virus did not originate from Nigeria. The proximity-credibility factor confirms Mangal and Mangal's (2018, p.41) position that human behavior "is dynamic and subjective."

From the three environments presented in Figure 1, the mass media, emboldened by emerging democratic environment, contend against human manipulation; based on ownership change. For instance, the Christian Broadcasting Network, an international Christian television network, is not obliged to air programmes that do not agree with its ideology. In Nigeria, the ideological bent of the *New Nigerian* newspaper is in favour of the 19 northern states which see it as “a political creation (representing) the views and aspirations of the north” (Galadima & Enighe, 2001, p.63). It implies that the mass media today have their structure, mission and contents dictated by certain environmental factors.

The human environment depicts agreement with Lepri et al. (2011) that there exists no common methodology prescribed for persuasion by media contents. In Malaysia, where the legal framework is Sharia-based, media contents that promote gambling and alcohol-based products are unacceptable (Run et al., 2010); a proof that religion plays roles in consumption of media contents. It also confirms postulations that media consumers are not “gullible, passive or controllable” as imputed by the selected theories (Okocha & Akpe, 2022, p.5).

These conflicting scenarios informed the desire by these researchers to construct a hybrid communication environment—a cross-breeding of contending elements. The proposed theory is a middle ground between the mainstream and the new media, and between the previous Euro-centric system and a globally applicable system (Okocha & Akpe, 2022). It is a remedy to the stated weaknesses and shortcomings of the selected theories; and a liberation from the assumed passive subordination of man to the mass media and the manipulation of the mass media by the ruling class.

### **Critical assessment of the selected theories**

George Gerbner, a communication scholar, originated the cultivation theory in the 1960s to explain the influence of television programmes on heavy viewers. The theory came at a time television viewing was not only a uniquely growing experience, but a commanding storytelling vehicle. This explains why the theory focused on television in terms of influence and effects (Shrum, 2017, p.1). It aimed at exploring the longstanding influence of the media (Vinney, 2022); suggesting that heavy and consistent television viewers recognize the most repeated televised messages as true depiction of real-life situations (Ozer, 2013) and patterned their behaviours after them.

The primary supposition of this theory is that the longer people watch television programmes, the more their perceptions of the outside world will reflect the programme contents (Shrum, 2017); meaning that viewers are non-discriminating in their viewing culture. The argument, however, cannot be sustained because individual viewers’ habits are either inhibited or enhanced by cultural orientation, taste, religion, and social beliefs. Based on this, television audiences are not likely to accept everything beamed to them without questions. Despite whatever worked in favour of this theory in its early days, certain already identified flaws have created opportunities for fresh theoretical innovations. Shrum (2017) demands a modification of the theory and its fundamental procedures.

Also, the development of the limited effect theory by Paul Lazarsfeld, states Nevzat (2018), has altered initial unchallenged perceived infallibility of cultivation theory. The limited effect theory states that the mass media are not as formidable and overwhelmingly persuasive as claimed; due to certain influential factors that control media contents. To further melt the assumed powers of this theory and its mass effects, Joseph Klapper developed the selective exposure, selective perception and selective retention theories postulating that media consumers only select messages that do not contradict their own perceptions (Nevzat, 2018).

Certain empirical studies have added to submissions that researchers are yet to establish in concrete terms how effects of cultivation theory are calculated (Lee & Niederdeppe, 2010). Lindel et al. (2024) mention in their empirical analysis that with the emergence of the social media, television has lost its ancestral

supremacy as the leading source of socialization. Both research findings re-emphasise the limited effects of the cultivation theory as propounded.

One irredeemable weakness of this theory is that it does not present a realistic image of the world. Instead, as captured by Gamson et al. (2003, p.374), it misleads the audience with “media-generated images of the world,” by using such constructed beliefs to create meaning about political and social issues. Mosharafa (2015) calls it false creation with focus on select issues that satisfy media owners. The true image is that media contents are influenced by factors that favour the taste, education, and psychology of the audience and can therefore not elicit a predictable reaction. From the source, media contents grapple with the ideologies, ownership influence and legal frameworks, which might not be acceptable to the audience.

Again, this theory has no convincing evidence to confirm audience’s development of habits based on what is watched on television (Porter, 2006). The theory only assumes that the media can manipulate the publics into irresistibly perceiving fictions offered on television as reality (Munawar, 2020). Citing Shrum & Bischak (2001), Munawar perceives the theory as assuming that its dramatized fiction will ultimately influence peoples’ real-life experiences. This assumption ignores audience’s ability to choices and freedom of thought.

Further questions are being raised against the relevance of cultivation theory (Munawar, 2020) following the emergence of digital technology, the preponderance of television channels and other mass media. Munawar confirms that multiple mass media innovations have challenged the assumption that television is the biggest storyteller.

Developed in 1927 by Harold Lasswell, the hypodermic or magic bullet theory hypothecates that the sender of a mass communicated message ultimately determines how the audiences receive and react to the message. According to Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2018), it presupposes that all messages released by the mass media to a mass audience are not only directly received but also wholly welcomed.

Here, the media content is visually compared to a bullet while the media outlet constitutes the gun which fires the bullet straight into the brain of the audience, undisturbed (Mehrad et al., 2020; Burtler & Hendricks, 2022). Viewed from metaphorical perspective, the hypodermic needle constitutes the media establishment that injects the audience with information; with predictable uniformed reaction. This assumption completely ignores the verified capacity of the audience to engage in selective exposure, perception and retention (Nwabueze and Okonkwo, 2018).

The theory likens media messages to a fired bullet that annihilates the audiences; extinguishing any counteraction. It also presents an image of a deactivated audience, who, on being hit by the bullet, react in a congregational manner. Saha (2023) says this analogy presents a powerless audience with no counter source of information; no right to question or refuse whatever is communicated; but mentally and emotionally programmed to react in a similar manner.

These assumptions contradict findings by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld that the mass media do not control the people. The findings also promote homogeneity rather than heterogeneity of the audiences (Bineham (2009), ignoring mediating features such as culture and religion that cause people to react differently to media contents. Bineham (2009, p.241) believes that one message cannot elicit similar responses from the various audiences. He argues that “unless one needle can be inserted into one amalgamated mass, no hypodermic model exists.” By suggesting that all media audiences have the same mindset (OSUO (2017); the hypodermic theory is suspiciously manipulative; and because its conclusions have no empirical foundation, it does not satisfy the requirement for a theory.

Far back in 1948, the hypodermic theory experienced a scholarly-cultivated setback when Lazerfield et al., conducted largescale research on the influence of mass media messages on voters’ behavior during American Presidential elections of 1940 and 1944. The outcome established a two-stage nature of

communication (Vorobyev, 2018). Their findings confirmed that mass media contents “do not have direct influence on the target audience,” but that any verified effects of media contents resulted from interpersonal interactions “through the instrumentality of opinion leaders” (Nwabueze and Okonkwo, 2018, p.3) who mediate between message encoders and decoders. Crespo (2021) also states that age, class, religion, culture and political affiliation play great roles in audiences’ vulnerability to influence and pressure from media contents. That means audiences are not as helpless as it was assumed. This theory seems to have lost its magic and “has since faded into obsolescence” (Nwabueze and Okonkwo, 2018, p.5).

The implication of the outcome of the empirical study by Lazerfeld et al. (1948) is that its findings place importance on the minimality and limitations of the effects of mass media contents on consumers as determined by such variables as religious beliefs, cultural and political biases (Crespo, 2021). The limitation theory reiterates the fact that the effects of any information released by the mass media to the audience does not have the assumed overwhelming impact as projected in the hypodermic theory but are determined by the individual consumer.

Framing is an effect-based media theory conceptualized by a sociologist, Erving Goffman, in the 1970s; and has a close relationship with agenda setting theory (Borah, 2011). However, while agenda setting tells the audience what to think about, framing tells them how to think (Bajracharya, 2018); and deliberately divert audience’s focus from what is important to what they want to promote. Framing seeks to develop specific conceptualization of an issue (Chong and Druckman, 2007). It comprises selection and salience; which connote deliberately creating conspicuousness from a mass media item for visibility that compels attention (Entman, 1993).

Framing replaces objectivity with subjectivity. Framing arbitrarily manipulates facts for purposes of gaining subjective prominence. Bullock and Shulman (2021) describe it as a news construction that ignores an alternative perspective on the same issue. Framed messages are specific-goal-directed through deliberate highlighting and exclusion. What is framed is not the totality of what is. Benford (1997) labels framing as a boundary that pushes out certain elements and keeps others within view. It places issues within a field of meaning through pre-determined and constricted framework (Arowolo, 2017).

Consequential organization, interpretation and projection of select realities aimed at promoting specific interest-driven aspect of such realities also defines framing. This could be achieved through slants in news and headlines, visuals, or advertising texts, all directed at influencing audiences’ perception (Bruggmann, 2014). Frames are deceptive communication strategies (Chong & Druckerman, 2007, p.111); and are often exaggerated constructs that manipulate the “fears and prejudices of the people.” Bullock and Shulman (2021) confirm that availability, accessibility and applicability constitute the mechanics that determine framing effect.

So, framing comprises deliberate distortion of realities through diversion of attention from totality to specific aspects of issues that generates benefits for the sponsor. This distorts the truth, limits debate and builds mistrust against the media (Bajracharya, 2018). With framing, mass media messages are released with expectations of pre-determined effects, ignorant of any environmentally-modifying factors. Vanderwees (2020) says framing treats the audience as a homogenous entity that irresistibly absorbs and reacts to messages the same way.

However, Scheufele (1999, p.105) has since announced the inevitable waning relevance of framing theory. Citing Klapper (1960), Scheufele notes that media campaigns hardly impact people; instead, “their major effect is the reinforcement of existing attitudes.” This empirically-cited conclusion is yet to be invalidated with fresh findings. In another empirical study, Druckman (2001) concludes that the effect of framing is limited by credibility of the source while the importance attached to belief system arbitrates it.



Nailing the flirting relevance of the above theories is the abundance of foreign news channels which has broken the monopoly of information management by the local press (Lopez-Rabadan, 2022). Also, the already identified environmental variables have combined to limit the powers of these theories; signaling their deserved retirement (Cacciatore et al., 2016) on grounds of dysfunctionality.

The relevance of each of these theories has been weighed down and rendered obsolete by time, technology and other environmental phenomena which were not in existence when framing, hypodermic needle and cultivation theories were coined. From the cited empirical studies and analysis, the need for a communication theory that would draw from the past, founded in the present and aimed for the future has emerged. This where the Environmental Dynamo Theory becomes germane.

### **Significance of Environmental Dynamo Theory**

The proposed theory is emphatically concerned with encoding and decoding of mass media messages based on the socio-cultural and psychological dynamics of media audience and the eco-system. It states that there are certain inescapable environmental factors that mediate to influence the contents and effects of mass media messages between the source and the destination. These factors, which include culture, religion, and technology, determine the configuration of media content and its reception by the audience. That means every media message is encoded or decoded based on the influences of these factors, which either alter or enhance the reception and reaction to the message. As stated in the model, these mediating variables go beyond their immediate media and human environments.

The proposed theory questions and reconstructs the linearity of communication, which presently only recognizes the message, the sender, the receiver and the expected effects (Hall, 2005). It re-awakens consciousness in the inevitable two-step flow of communication (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948); a role that was later consolidated in a study by Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955), according to Griswold (2022). The envisaged Environmental Dynamo Media Theory sees human communication as “a social interaction process” that “shares ideas, information, opinions, facts, feelings, and experiences between a sender and a receiver” (Zahid et al., 2021, p.3).

Constructed to be significantly different from others, the proposed theory argues that people receive, interpret, and react to mass media messages individually; not homogeneously. It agrees with Hall (2005), cited by Krogerus and Tschappeler (2018), that messages are decoded based on individual’s socio-cultural influences—there is no generally-adopted clear-cut procedure. Both the encoding and decoding processes of the message are unavoidably determined by certain internal and external influences which include technology, culture, beliefs, among others. These factors create “content-related bias” and assist in managing social conducts (Cronk, 2016, p.49).

This theoretical proposition is not a mere alternative, but an addition to already developed theories that are deliberately globalized without considering the environmental peculiarities of other climes. As observed by Davidson and Andrade (2018, p.760) various researchers have relied on “dominant theoretical ideology, i.e., the superiority of Western-originated theories” to the neglect of “their own indigenous concepts.” This proposition is uniquely a combination of both the digital and indigenous theoretical concepts without bias towards any. It seeks to satisfy “new theoretical developments” anchored more on “specific contexts rather than modifications to existing theory” (Davidson and Andrade, 2018 p.762).

Completely dismissing the selected media-effects theories as non-relevant is not the intent of this study. Environmental Dynamo Theory is a fresh invitation to communication scholars for another intellectual communion to re-examine existing media-effects theories against their relevance in the present techno-driven, socio-cultural dynamics and globalized communication era. The aim is to move the existing theories from the locality that influenced their propositions to the global scene where their continued validity would be empirically tested. This is what makes this proposition significant.

## Methodology

A quantitative research method was adopted for this study. Three data collection approaches—online, face-to-face, and use of research assistants—were adopted. A purposive sampling technique was chosen in selecting the target respondents comprising the main data source that contributed to the study. They were purposively selected because of the specialized nature of the investigation.

A structured survey questionnaire with 62 questions grouped under 11 headings was designed and administered. The rationale behind the questions and headings was to adequately address the research objectives. The research instrument was validated by subject matter experts. Out of about 850 questionnaires sent out, 670 copies were returned. This represents 78.8% return rate. This milestone was made possible by the efforts of six research assistants who made repeated attempts to get more respondents within the time allotted for the investigation. Informed consent and confidentiality were obtained from each of the respondents before clearance to participate in the survey. Each participant was made to understand the reason, sensitivity and confidentiality of the survey.

Respondents were drawn from universities across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones made up of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. These universities were chosen to reflect representativeness of the sampled population since they are based in different parts of the country with different religious, cultural and language differences, which could affect their viewpoints since the dynamics are different. The aim was to create more inclusiveness and enhance the debate. Again, these are universities with mass communication departments. The geopolitical representation was meant to reinforce the generalization and authentication of the findings.

In the North Central Zone, three universities (Bingham University, Karu; Nassarawa State University, Keffi; and University of Abuja) were sampled; in the South East, two universities (Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; and University of Nigeria, Nsukka) were chosen; in the South South, two universities (University of Uyo, Uyo; and Akwa Ibom State University, Ikot Akpaden) were picked; in the North West, one university (Kaduna State University, Kaduna) was sampled; in the North East, one university (Taraba State University, Jalingo) was chosen, while in the South West, two universities (Babcock University, Ilishan Remo; and University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba) participated in the survey. The aim was to ensure that mass communication departments in universities in all parts of the country have representative samples. The respondents comprised scholars, final year undergraduates, and post-graduate students of mass communications. As earlier indicated, the decision was informed by the need to purposively sample the views of people directly connected with the selected theories in their daily academic work. The research instrument had 62 questions grouped under 11 different headings.

## Data Presentation

In this section, we present the report of the survey carried out among 670 sampled populations which comprised final year students of mass communication (400-level), post-graduate diploma, master, doctoral students and mass communication scholars. Each table here represents specific findings based on the research instrument. The data, presented in tables, create better understanding because it provides visual narratives in a comparative manner. Each table embodies a specific survey enquiry based on the variables presented and the responses from the sampled population. In all the analysis and interpretation of data below, scores presented under **Strongly Agree** and **Agree** were grouped to indicate affirmation or agreement while **Strongly Disagree** and **Disagree** were also grouped to indicate non-affirmation or disagreement. That means the final figures and percentage calculations were reached based on this approach.

**Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Males</b>	247	36.87
<b>Females</b>	423	63.13
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Age</b>		
<b>20-30</b>	525	78.35
<b>31-40</b>	58	8.66
<b>41-50</b>	18	2.69
<b>51-60</b>	49	7.31
<b>61-70</b>	20	2.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Geo-political zones</b>		
<b>North West</b>	98	14.63
<b>North Central</b>	119	17.76
<b>South West</b>	111	16.57
<b>South East</b>	106	15.82
<b>South South</b>	109	16.27
<b>North East</b>	127	18.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	
<b>Categories</b>		
<b>Students</b>	592	88.36
<b>Lecturers</b>	78	11.64
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Study, 2023*

**Table 1** shows the gender, the ages and the geo-political zones and the categories of respondents covered in the survey. It indicates that 423 females (63.13%) and 247 males (36.87%) constituted the respondents while 525 people (78.35%) under the age of 30 formed majority of the respondents. The table also indicates a spread of the research instrument across the target areas. Comparatively, 592 students (88.36%) constituted the plurality of the respondents, with the lecturers making up the balance of 78 (11.64) participants. The results generally demonstrated the maturity, knowledge and level of exposure of the respondents to the issue discussed in the study.

**Table 2:** Certain communication theories propounded several years ago have lost their usefulness/relevance due to current development in the media world.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>percentage (%)</b>
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	213	31.79
<b>Agree</b>	366	54.63
<b>Not Sure</b>	50	7.46
<b>Disagree</b>	30	4.48
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	11	1.64
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Study, 2023*

**Table 2** affirms the assumption that some of the communication theories, including the three analyzed in this study, have lost their usefulness, which means they longer fit into the scheme of things considering certain social and technological developments. In all, 579 (86.42%) of the respondents yielded to the suggestion that the scrutinized theories have lost their relevance. Only 50 respondents (7.46%) were unsure,

while only 41 (6.12%), rejected the suggestion. The implication of these findings is that such theories that have lost their relevance because of non-alignment with fresh developments in the media world neither belong to this age nor to the future.

**Table 3:** There is need to propound new theories that would not only replace the weak or outdated ones, but would embody solutions to challenges posed by recent development in the media space

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	289	43.13
<b>Agree</b>	330	49.26
<b>Not Sure</b>	38	5.67
<b>Disagree</b>	5	0.75
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	8	1.19
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 3** shows that 619 (92.39%) of the respondents validated the proposed initiation of a new theory with in-built solutions to disputations found in the analyzed theories. Only 38 persons (5.67%) said they were not sure of the need for new theories while 13 persons (1.94%) of the respondents voted against such new theories. The conclusion supports the need for a new theory with all the necessary embodiments that would replace the weak or outdated ones. These findings constitute an endorsement of the need for a new theory, as proposed.

**Table 4:** The audience, in modern communication environment, has moved from a passive consumer to an active participant in the media process

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	281	41.94
<b>Agree</b>	301	44.92
<b>Not Sure</b>	74	11.04
<b>Disagree</b>	7	1.05
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	7	1.05
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 4** displays the diverse positions of the respondents with 582 (86.86%) of them affirming a major and irreversible shift away from the previous unproven assumptions regarding the helplessness of the audience towards media contents and the all-conquering nature of media messages injected into the consumers. These findings invalidate such assumptions embodied in the three analyzed theories to the effect that media consumers are at the mercy of media operators and whatever message they choose to feed the audience with. Only 74 respondents (11.04%) remained uncertain while 14 (2.10%), had contrary opinion. With this verdict, it is clear that the old method where the audience was passive has to be replaced with a media process where the consumer is a participant in line with the new media environment.

**Table 5:** Modern communication requires theories that embody or create a meeting point between the environmental dynamics from both the content consumers and the mass media

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	226	33.73
<b>Agree</b>	365	54.48
<b>Not Sure</b>	59	8.81
<b>Disagree</b>	14	2.09
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	6	0.89
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 5** indicates further assertion by 591 (88.21%) of the respondents on the need for fresh communication theories that would merge the inescapable challenging environmental variables from both the mass media and the audiences. In all, 59 (8.81%) respondents were not sure of the need for theories with such components while 20 (2.98%) disagreed with the assumption for theories with these characteristics. This affirmative finding further strengthens the proposition for a new theory that meets this demand.

**Table 6:** The mass media require a more integrated theory that will adapt or respond to predictable human, environmental and political dynamics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	195	29.10
<b>Agree</b>	372	55.52
<b>Not Sure</b>	82	12.24
<b>Disagree</b>	16	2.39
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	5	0.75
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Study, 2023*

**Table 6** shows that in addition to establishing a meeting point between the audience and the mass media as earlier confirmed in previous findings in this study, 567 (84.62%) respondents attested to the need for new theories with capacities to contain certain evolving dynamics not captured or prepared for in the existing theories. From the findings, 21 (3.14%) persons disagreed with the suggestion while 82 (12.24%) expressed uncertainty. The overwhelming affirmation of this proposition has validated the suggestion for a new theory in this study.

**Table 7:** Impacts of media contents on the audience are still predictable

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Strongly agree</b>	157	23.43
<b>Agree</b>	307	45.82
<b>Not sure</b>	117	17.46
<b>Disagree</b>	74	11.05
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	15	2.24
<b>Total</b>	<b>670</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Field Study, 2023*

**Table 7** shows the belief of the respondents that media contents are still predictable under the existing theoretical order—an assumption that runs contrary to or places question marks on the evolving realities influenced by emerging environmental forces observed in this study. A total of 464 respondents (69.25%) confirmed this, 117 (17.46%) stated that they were not sure, while 89 respondents (13.29%) disagreed with the assumption. The consequence of this conclusion is a call for a reversal of the factors that configure media contents to meet a determined result.

**Table 8:** The following variables in the human environment determined how humans relate with the media

SN	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Culture	<b>324</b> (48.36%)	<b>280</b> (41.79%)	<b>50</b> (7.46%)	<b>14</b> (2.09%)	<b>2</b> (0.30%)
2	Religion	<b>301</b> (44.92%)	<b>293</b> (43.73%)	<b>50</b> (7.46%)	<b>21</b> (3.13%)	<b>5</b> (0.75%)
3	Education	<b>392</b> (58.51%)	<b>238</b> (35.52%)	<b>27</b> (4.03%)	<b>11</b> (1.64)	<b>2</b> (0.30%)
4	Technology	<b>378</b> (56.42%)	<b>232</b> (34.63%)	<b>49</b> (7.31%)	<b>10</b> (1.49%)	<b>1</b> (0.15%)
5	Exposure	<b>333</b> (49.70%)	<b>250</b> (37.31%)	<b>76</b> (11.34%)	<b>10</b> (1.49%)	<b>1</b> (0.15%)
6	Choices	<b>238</b> (35.52%)	<b>294</b> (43.88%)	<b>110</b> (16.42%)	<b>22</b> (3.28%)	<b>6</b> (0.89%)
7	Location	<b>209</b> (31.19%)	<b>275</b> (41.04%)	<b>137</b> (20.45%)	<b>30</b> (4.48%)	<b>19</b> (2.83%)
8	Beliefs	<b>180</b> (26.86%)	<b>267</b> (39.85%)	<b>161</b> (24.03%)	<b>45</b> (6.72%)	<b>17</b> (2.54%)
9	Language	<b>292</b> (43.58%)	<b>271</b> (40.45%)	<b>73</b> (10.89%)	<b>26</b> (3.88%)	<b>8</b> (1.19%)
10	Experience	<b>294</b> (43.88%)	<b>277</b> (41.34%)	<b>74</b> (11.04%)	<b>16</b> (2.39%)	<b>9</b> (1.34%)
11	Interaction	<b>300</b> (44.78%)	<b>269</b> (40.15%)	<b>74</b> (11.04%)	<b>24</b> (3.58%)	<b>3</b> (0.45%)
12	Politics	<b>303</b> (45.22%)	<b>277</b> (41.34%)	<b>70</b> (10.45%)	<b>17</b> (2.54%)	<b>3</b> (0.45%)
13	Participation	<b>238</b> (35.52%)	<b>306</b> (45.67%)	<b>86</b> (12.83%)	<b>24</b> (3.58%)	<b>16</b> (2.39%)

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 8** affirms how certain human variables, earlier discussed, influence the audiences' relationship with the mass media, and by extension, how such dynamics impact upon the consumption of media contents and the possible reactions. From the 13 variables presented, the endorsements were as follows: culture (90.15%) of the respondents; religion (88.65%); education (94.03%); technology (91.05%); exposure (87.01%); choices (79.40%); location (72.23%); beliefs (66.71%); language (84.03%); experience (85.22%); interaction (84.93%); politics (86.56%); and participation (81.19%). These findings doubtlessly confirm that the named environmental forces and several others, play significant roles in determining how individual audience member relates with the mass media contents.

**Table 9:** The impact of the mass media on the audience in the modern era is determined by the following environmental dynamics

SN	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Technology	<b>409</b> (61.04%)	<b>235</b> (35.07%)	<b>21</b> (3.13%)	<b>4</b> (0.59%)	<b>1</b> (0.15%)
2	Funding	<b>201</b> (30.00%)	<b>293</b> (43.73%)	<b>133</b> (19.85%)	<b>40</b> (5.97%)	<b>3</b> (0.45%)
3	Legal Control	<b>158</b> (23.58%)	<b>266</b> (39.70%)	<b>182</b> (27.26%)	<b>59</b> (8.80%)	<b>5</b> (0.75%)
4	News Content	<b>349</b> (52.09%)	<b>257</b> (38.36%)	<b>42</b> (6.27%)	<b>21</b> (3.13%)	<b>1</b> (0.15%)
5	Ownership	<b>212</b> (31.64%)	<b>268</b> (40.00%)	<b>128</b> (19.10)	<b>53</b> (7.91%)	<b>9</b> (1.34%)
6	Ideology	<b>257</b> (38.39%)	<b>292</b> (43.58%)	<b>88</b> (13.13%)	<b>30</b> (4.48%)	<b>3</b> (0.45%)
7	Participation	<b>296</b> (44.18%)	<b>282</b> (42.09%)	<b>69</b> (10.30%)	<b>15</b> (2.24%)	<b>8</b> (1.19%)
8	Power-Play	<b>145</b> (21.64%)	<b>231</b> (34.48%)	<b>237</b> (35.37%)	<b>46</b> (6.85%)	<b>11</b> (1.64%)
9	Expertise	<b>187</b> (27.91%)	<b>268</b> (40.00%)	<b>157</b> (23.43%)	<b>53</b> (7.91%)	<b>5</b> (0.75%)
10	Env. Issues	<b>181</b> (27.01%)	<b>280</b> (41.79%)	<b>154</b> (22.98%)	<b>42</b> (6.27%)	<b>13</b> (1.94%)
11	Location	<b>221</b> (32.98%)	<b>296</b> (44.18%)	<b>111</b> (16.57%)	<b>32</b> (4.78%)	<b>10</b> (1.49%)
12	Culture	<b>293</b> (43.73%)	<b>274</b> (40.89%)	<b>73</b> (10.89%)	<b>22</b> (3.28%)	<b>8</b> (1.19%)
13	Benefits	<b>248</b> 37.01	<b>294</b> (43.88%)	<b>84</b> (12.54%)	<b>36</b> (5.37%)	<b>8</b> (1.19%)
14	Control	<b>190</b> (28.39%)	<b>284</b> (42.39%)	<b>126</b> (18.80%)	<b>59</b> (8.80%)	<b>11</b> (1.64%)

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 9** shows respondents' belief that the articulated environmental factors are indisputable determinants of the level of impact of the mass media and their contents on the audience. Respondents scored each variable differently: technology (96.11%); funding (73.73%); legal control (63.28%); contents (90.45%); ownership (71.64%); ideology (81.97%); participation (86.27%); power play (56.12); expertise (67.91%); environmental issues (68.80%); location (77.16%); culture (84.62%); benefits (80.89%); and control (70.78%). These affirmations imply that such forces have the capacity to either enhance, reduce or block every level of influence of the mass media contents on the consumers.

**Table 10:** Beyond the media and human environments, the following broader factors determine how the media and their audiences interact

SN	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	International Politics	285 (42.54%)	332 (49.55%)	48 (7.16%)	3 0.45	2 (0.30%)
2	Global Economy	275 (41.04%)	303 (45.22%)	72 (10.75%)	17 (2.53%)	3 (0.45%)
3	Cultural Diplomacy	235 (35.07%)	300 (44.78%)	110 (16.42%)	22 (3.28%)	3 (0.45%)
4	International Media	276 (41.19%)	268 (40.00%)	102 (15.22%)	22 (3.28%)	2 (0.30%)
5	Foreign Policy	214 (31.94%)	274 (40.89%)	144 (21.49%)	27 (4.03%)	11 (1.64%)
6	Language	287 (42.83%)	280 (41.79%)	79 (11.79%)	17 (2.53%)	7 (1.04%)
7	Location	222 (33.13%)	284 (42.39%)	114 (17.01%)	32 (4.78%)	18 (2.69%)
8	Technological Development	312 (46.57%)	254 (37.91%)	72 (10.75%)	24 (3.68%)	8 (1.19%)
9	Media Contents	341 (50.89%)	258 (38.51%)	54 (8.06%)	10 (1.49%)	7 (1.04%)

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 10** presents findings which introduced and emphatically confirmed the supposition that beyond the local environmental factors, certain broader or foreign issues play significant roles in determining the media contents and the perception of the consumers towards such contents. These issues and their assertions by the respondents include: international politics (92.09%); global economy (86.26%); cultural diplomacy (79.85%); international media (81.19%); foreign policy (72.83%); language (84.62%); location (75.52%); technological development (84.48%); and media contents (89.40%). Each of these factors is endorsed as loaded with ability to affect local media contents and audience's acceptance or rejection of such contents. The summation here is that with the development of advanced communication technology, media contents and consumption are no longer limited to the immediate environment and local influences. Several broad issues have taken limitation of mass media content and access out of the confinement of local regulators. Consumers now have choices because of access. Media contents are now patterned to reflect certain global best practices and interactions.



**Table 11:** The interaction between the human and the mass media based on mediating environmental factors will result in the creation of a new communication eco-system based on the following factors

SN	Variables	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Type of Culture	<b>257</b> (38.35%)	<b>263</b> (39.25%)	<b>111</b> (16.57%)	<b>37</b> (5.52%)	<b>2</b> (0.30%)
2	Level of Education	<b>349</b> (52.09%)	<b>263</b> (39.25%)	<b>47</b> (7.01%)	<b>9</b> (1.34%)	<b>2</b> (0.30%)
3	Technological Development	<b>338</b> (50.45%)	<b>266</b> (39.70%)	<b>55</b> (8.21%)	<b>11</b> (1.64%)	<b>0</b> (0 %)
4	Media Choices	<b>240</b> (35.82%)	<b>291</b> (43.43%)	<b>116</b> (17.31%)	<b>15</b> (2.24%)	<b>8</b> (1.19%)
5	Language	<b>258</b> (38.51%)	<b>272</b> (40.60%)	<b>107</b> (15.97%)	<b>20</b> (2.98%)	<b>13</b> (1.94%)
6	Type of Control	<b>175</b> (26.12%)	<b>274</b> (40.89%)	<b>163</b> (24.33%)	<b>54</b> (8.06%)	<b>4</b> (0.60%)
7	Participation	<b>267</b> (39.85%)	<b>286</b> (42.69%)	<b>100</b> (14.92%)	<b>14</b> (2.09%)	<b>3</b> (0.45%)
8	Media Ownership	<b>243</b> (36.27%)	<b>271</b> (40.45%)	<b>119</b> (17.76%)	<b>33</b> (4.92%)	<b>4</b> (0.60%)
9	Media Ideology	<b>215</b> (32.09%)	<b>299</b> (44.63%)	<b>130</b> (19.40%)	<b>24</b> (3.58%)	<b>2</b> (0.30%)
10	Sources of Funding	<b>226</b> (33.73%)	<b>267</b> (39.85%)	<b>135</b> (20.15%)	<b>36</b> (5.37%)	<b>6</b> (0.89%)
11	Media Contents	<b>307</b> (45.82%)	<b>270</b> (40.30%)	<b>81</b> (12.09%)	<b>12</b> (1.79%)	<b>0</b> (0%)
12	Level of Expertise	<b>244</b> (36.42%)	<b>270</b> (40.30%)	<b>114</b> (17.01%)	<b>38</b> (5.67%)	<b>4</b> (0.60%))
13	Legal Control	<b>218</b> (32.53%)	<b>257</b> (38.36%)	<b>151</b> (22.54%)	<b>39</b> (5.82%)	<b>5</b> (0.75%)
14	Foreign Policy	<b>197</b> (29.40%)	<b>249</b> (37.16%)	<b>160</b> (23.88%)	<b>46</b> (6.86%)	<b>18</b> (2.69%))
15	Economy	<b>269</b> (40.15%)	<b>291</b> (43.43%)	<b>89</b> (13.28%)	<b>16</b> (2.39%)	<b>5</b> (0.75%)
16	International Politics	<b>225</b> (33.58%)	<b>274</b> (40.89%)	<b>119</b> (17.76%)	<b>34</b> (5.07%)	<b>18</b> (2.69%)

Source: Field Study, 2023

**Table 11** practically seals the argument on the need for a convergence of mediating variables towards the creation of a new theory. The endorsement of this proposal, based on the interaction of several factors were as follows: culture (77.60%); education (91.34%); technology (90.15%); media choices (79.25%); language (79.11); control (67.01); participation (82.54%); ownership (76.72%); ideology (76.72%); funding (73.58%); media contents (86.12%); level expertise (76.72%); legal control (70.89%); foreign policy (66.56%); economy (83.58%); and international politics (74.47%). Media choices, as used here, refers to the varieties of mass media platforms available to media consumers following the invention of the internet which has resulted in creation of several digital media outlets and ability to access international media. This has broken the monopoly enjoyed previously by the traditional and local media. The level of expertise refers to not just the production know-how enhanced by technological development and exposure, but also the quality of media content creations which differs from what was obtained before. The above approval rating

confirms the vision propounded in this research for a new theoretical experience called the Environmental Dynamo Media Theory.

### **Discussion of Findings**

This study set out to empirically justify reasons for replacement of three mass media theories with proven weaknesses or pure incapacitation in the midst of emerging environmental factors that have irredeemably eclipsed whatever communication values they possessed at birth. The devalued theories are the hypodermic needle (magic bullet), framing and cultivation. The study contextually analyzed their obvious irrelevance arising from tested weaknesses by comparing their earlier historical significance to the developing environmental peculiarities that have taken the wind out of their sail. Therefore, this study was about the need for deeper, dispassionate reflections on what to do with a history that has been pushed into inessentiality by modernity, by considering three specific objectives that would either obscure or enhance our discussion.

Again, in discussing the findings, we combined both the Strongly Agree and the Agree options to mean an affirmation or agreement by the respondents to issues raised in the survey while the Strongly Disagree and Disagree options were also be combined to mean disagreement or rejection of the suggestions raised in the research instrument. These were used to calculate both the figures and the percentages.

The first objective of this study was to examine the assumptions and limitations of the selected theories. In doing this, we did a survey with a target audience of mainly students and scholars in the mass communication field—people who are daily exposed to studies and research in areas that involve application of the three identified theories. Their collective response to the assumption captured in Table 2 is that these communication theories have lost their relevance due to unforeseen development in the mass media industry. They confirm the need for further discussion on the alternatives to these theories. An overwhelming 579 (86.42%) of the 670 sampled population confirmed and accepted the suggestion concerning the three theories. These findings corroborate the earlier positions of Nwabueze and Okonkwo (2018) that these theories have since faded into obsolescence.

Findings in Table 3 also show a commanding acceptance of the need to propound new theories that would either replace the scrutinized ones, or activate practical solutions to the shortcomings noticed in them. A total of 619 respondents representing 92.39% of the sampled population unreservedly opted for initiation of new theories. This further confirms Davidson and Andrade (2018) recommendation for a new theoretical development.

In Table 4, findings indicate that with the advent of sophisticated communication technology, media audiences have become active participants in the communication process—no more detachment. They corroborate earlier findings by Pereze-Seijo et al. (2020) that audience participation enriches journalistic contents; Srinivasin and Lopes (2018) who announced that across Africa, interactive television shows have bludgeoned; and Ayo-Obiremi and Adelabu's (2020) declaration that passive media audience is outdated. In Table 5 and Table 6, findings favour theories with common ground experiences between the media operators and users; and theories that would respond to unforeseen environmental dynamics. Except these are done, respondents believe that reactions to media contents will still remain predictable (Table 7).

These findings, especially as they concern the analyzed limitations of the three theories, arising from the stated objective, implies that except the suggested changes are carried out with the aim of removing the established limitations, the use of these theories in solving social problems through academic research, with the aim to creating policy decisions, would not produce accurate and dependable results.

The second objective of the study was to explain the significance of the proposed Environmental Dynamo Media Theory. Findings established from the investigation of the objective affirmed existence of certain unavoidable variables that significantly shape mass media contents and influence how the audience react to such contents. Such variables include source of funding, technology, legal control, ownership influence,

ideology, impact of audience participation, level of expertise, expected benefits, media culture, among others. These factors, which are lacking in the three theories selected for this study, contribute to the construction of media content, packaging, and transmission.

Statistics obtained from sampled population further affirmed the significance of the proposed theory for the inescapable fact that it takes into consideration the mediating influences of environmental factors such as culture, religion, education, social exposure, choices, political dynamics, participation, location, language, among others. Respondents to the research instrument agreed that these factors can alter, enhance or resist foresighted impact of media contents.

The Environmental Dynamo Media Theory re-introduces the traditional and empirically-proven two-step flow of information, confirmed by Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955), cited by Griswold (2022). This is against the outdated linearity projected by the three theories under scrutiny. Most importantly, the expected theory emphasizes non-homogeneous interpretation, and reaction to media messages because each audience member is guided by unalterable environmental incongruity.

Findings from this study corroborate the postulation by Krogerus and Tschappeler (2018) that messages are decoded based on individual class, education and cultural background and not based on manipulated forecasts. This implies that with the proposed theory, decision-making by government and individuals would not be based on pre-determined reactions to media contents by the consumers, but on independent effects of messages as determined by the variables already outlined.

The last objective of the study was to investigate public perception of the new theory. Findings indicate that the perceptions are reflected in the responses to the entire research instrument.

As captured in the survey findings, students and scholars of mass communication are undivided in their conviction that the industry needs a communication theory that embodies principles of democratized mass media guided by peculiar environmentally-propelled factors. They agree that certain theories of mass communication have outlived their usefulness arising from diverse religious beliefs, political affiliations, legal standards, globalized media, cultural identities, media ownership, ideologies, and such other influential variables. These are issues that shape media contents and audience responses.

Findings show that majority of the respondents to Table 2 (579 or 86.42%) agree that the three theories examined in this study have lost their usefulness. Their collective position, which could be interpreted as a direct endorsement of the proposed theory, is further expressed in Table 3 by 619 (92.39%) of the respondents, who perceive that such a new theory should embody solutions to the shortcomings already analyzed in the old theories. One of the characteristics expected to be embodied in the Environmental Dynamo Media Theory, audience participation, is again appreciated in Table 4; a scholarly position already examined by Pereze-Seijo et al. (2020) with a proof that audience participation enhances better message contents.

About 591 (88%) respondents in Table 5 favour merging of mediating factors in the human and mass media ecosystems so as to create an interactive atmosphere as a replacement of the previous belief that presented the mass media as a towering phenomenon while the users played subordinating roles. Another approval of the new theory is given in Table 6 where 569 (84.63%) respondents sanction a theory with integrating factors that would limit the predictability of the impacts of media contents on the audience, captured in Table 7.

Public perception of the new theory is clearly captured in the findings displayed in Table 8 where respondents endorse each of the 13 factors as possessing specific influence over how the mass media contents impact the audience. High on the list are education (94.03%); technology (91.05%); and culture (90.15%); while the lowest perceived influential factor is beliefs (66.7%). The variables examined in Table 9 as possessing the capacities to determine impact of media contents on individuals also received massive

scrutiny and corroboration from the sampled population. Some of the examined factors and their scores include: technology (96.11%); contents (90.45%); participation (86.27%); and ideology (81.97%).

Also captured in the model and confirmed by the public in Table 10 are what is termed the broader factors that play significant roles in determining not only the mass media contents but the taste of the audience towards such contents. Highly rated by the respondents are international politics (92.09); media contents (89.40); global economy (86.27%); language (84.63%); and cultural diplomacy (79.85%).

Responses to Table 11, present the ultimate acceptance of the proposed theory by the publics based on the convergence of the previously militating factors to create a communication environment with a mix of several mediating variables. As opposed to the old theories, the emerging theory parades no sense of superiority for either the human or the media environments. Instead, as confirmed by the respondents, each of the variables remain key determinants on how the media contents are framed and how each member of the audience reacts to such contents.

Their perception, as indicated in the findings, shows that the new theory has no room for either homogenous fabrication of media contents or mass reaction to such contents. High on the minds of the sampled population are: education (91.34%); technology (90.15%); and media contents (86.58%). It is no longer taken for granted how the content would be sculptured and how the audience will react; because factors that previously separated both the construction of the contents and audience reaction now interact to create a new eco-system called Environmental Dynamo Media Theory.

For purposes of policy making, findings from this study are proofs that with the emergence of the proposed theory, media information is now more balanced and diversified in content and irregular or differentiated in responses. Democratization of the mass media has replaced the hegemony in ownership and control that existed at the time the three theories were coined at different times in history. This implies that individual differences, which are influenced by separable understanding, acceptance or rejection of media contents, have to be considered. Media policies has to consider this deduction.

## Conclusion

This study concludes with a demand for further empirical studies on other age-stricken media theories with the ultimate intention of either updating or replacing them. Some of these theories, just like cultivation, framing and the hypodermic needle, were quite effective at birth in view of the circumstances or the political, social, economic and other environmental dynamics that ruled such era; but have been naturally rendered obsolete due to developments in technology, culture, politics, education, diplomatic forces. and other spheres.

Another area that demands further empirical research, arising from findings in this study, is how future communication theories should be framed in a manner that would not deprive them of unforeseen technological, cultural and other developments in the sciences and social sectors of the society, as observed in the three examined theories.

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