GERHARD MALETZKE'S MODEL OF MASS COMMUNICATION FROM THE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: *The German researcher Gerhard Maletzke developed a Model of Mass Communication from the social communication perspective in his study The Psychology of Mass Communication (1963). The novelty of his approach resides in viewing the mass-media as a transmission relay for communication among social actors, and not as a communicator. This article provides a synthesis of the original theoretical model and an inventory of its possible uses in online communication.*

Keywords: *Maletzke's model; online; communication; mass-media; information.*

INTRODUCTION

The present paper investigates Gerhard Maletzke's Model of Mass Communication (1963) at length as we consider that the majority of communication studies offer only limited analyses of this influential academic work. We shall present the original theoretical approach in order to prove the usability of the model for online communication.

To begin with, the critical difference between Maletzke's model of mass communication and other earlier theories is that the German researcher presents mass-media as a transmission relay for various social agents, involved in communication. In many Romanian scientific papers dealing with mass communication, the sender is viewed as a professional and powerful agent (usually a media institution), whereas the receiver is viewed as an amorphous and dispersed public, able to give para-feedback only. As a result, most researchers interpret Maletzke's model within this framework.

However, Maletzke believes that mass media actors are only intermediaries for the messages of the social communicators in the public sphere. This means that mass media retransmit the messages of social actors and only rarely do media actors transmit their own messages, when they become social actors themselves.

Maletzke claims that, in fact, the social actors are those who communicate among themselves, and mass media are the mere instrument which allows message spreading through institutionalization, professionalism and technical facilities. This theory was fully presented by Maletzke in his study, *The Psychology of Mass Communication* (1963).[1]

Mass communication

Maletzke's definition of mass communication reads as follows: Mass communication is that form of communication in which messages are transmitted to a dispersed audience, indirectly and in one way, by technical means of dissemination.[2]

We would like to emphasize the fact that one key word which differentiates between Maletzke's definition and others, is exactly the one missing from later citations, namely *indirectly*. This term does not refer to the fact that the communication process is made possible through technical means. It means that the relationship between the sender and the receiver is mediated by media actors, which further means that mass communication is social communication done indirectly (*i.e.* mediated by mass-media).[3] The German researcher defines mass communication in opposition with interpersonal communication. In his view, the latter is direct (face-to-face), personal, mutual, symmetrical, private and

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[1] Gerhard Maletzke, *Psychologie der Massenkommunikation*, Verlag Hans Bredow Institut, Hamburg, 1963.

[2] *Idem*, p.32.

[3] Heinz Bonfadelli, (ed.), *Einführung in die Publizistik-wissenschaft*, Haupt UTB, Bern, 2001, p.35.

carried out in the presence of both communicators. By contrast, mass communication is indirect, technologically mediated, asymmetrical, public and directed towards a spatially and temporally dispersed audience. Nonetheless, some questions remain for both types of communication: who are we? who is the receiver? what is the context of communication? how are we supposed to act and react? by what norms? All these factors were integrated into the Model of Mass Communication developed by Gerhard Maletzke.

Precursors and inspiration sources

Maletzke designed his Model of Mass Communication (which is the translation of the German phrase" Feldschema der Massenkommunikation") starting from the general model of communication developed by Harold Lasswell in 1948.

Who?→ Says what?→In which channel?→To whom?→ With what effect?
**(Sender) (Message)   (Medium)   (Receiver)
(Effect)**

Model of Communication (Harold Lasswell, 1948)

In developing his model, Maletzke has only taken into consideration the first four elements in Lasswell's scheme. In an interview given in 2002, the German researcher confessed that he did not include the fifth element, namely the effect, as he believes this represents the fundamental issue in mass communication. Maletzke took over the cybernetics category of interdependence and its principles: 1. Parameters control, correct and adjust each other; 2. The study of specific variables is relevant only if you consider the functioning of the entire system.

Maletzke's Model of Mass Communication

Maletzke's scheme (1963) is based on Harold Laswell's general model of communication from 1948, as declared by the author. So we find in Maletzke, Lasswell's classic scheme, with one difference in terminology: the *Sender* is called *Communicator*.

Lasswell: Sender --------- MESSAGE -------- Receiver

Maletzke: Communicator ------- MESSAGE ------ Receiver

Maletzke introduces the term *communicator* in his discourse on mass communication, inspired by the American society, but not the term *consumer*, also commonly used in American research, with reference to the consumer society. Hitherto nothing new. The more interesting part comes when Maletzke explains what he means by *communicator*.

A. Elements of mass communication

In Maletzke's view, the communicator is not mass-media, as we could expect, given other mass communication approaches. For the German researcher, the communicator is that social actor who has something to say to the public, who wants at some point to convey a message to a social dialogue partner. Both partners can be people or organizations, formal or informal groups that have become distinct voices in the public discourse.

The message can be conveyed by its author or by an intermediary, a spokesperson who may belong to the issuing agency or may be authorized by delegation of power; in his endeavor to deliver the message to the public, this intermediary may be driven by other interests than those of the issuer. For Maletzke, mass media are the intermediary in the comunication among social actors. Mass media take over the messages of social actors in order to disseminate them in the public sphere, using communications technology to cover an area as large as possible. In general, media transmit information about people and institutions from a given society. They rarely transmit internally generated information, and when that happens, they become social partners in the public dialogue.

Sender/   Communicator--------MESSAGE------- (Mass media) ----------- Receiver

In mass communication, the receiver of mass media messages is a dispersed public. By this, Maletzke refers to a heterogeneous and geographically spread public. Not all people read the newspaper at the same time and there are no links among individual receivers. Each person interprets the message in a distinct manner since individuals do not have the same backgrounds or interests.

From the scheme, we can notice that the message has already been formulated by the communicator

before being taken over by the media, which serve as a transmission relay. Mass media select the messages and act as a filter that can alter the information to various degrees: the messages can be conveyed ad litteram or can be reconstructed in such a manner that they do not match the intentions of the communicator anymore. Thus Maletzke's scheme of mass communication comprises three active entities: the communicator, the receiver and the media relay.

cultivation theory, formulated by George Gerbner in the 80s. By looking at the biographies of these two researchers, we can assume that they had a fruitful exchange of ideas. In 1961, Maletzke had a three–month scholarship in California, where he met Gerbner.
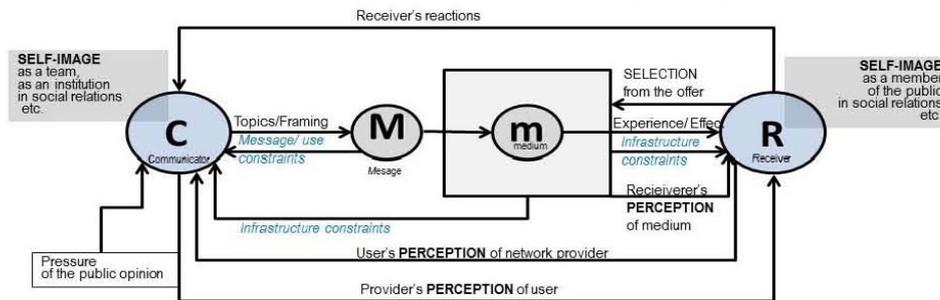
B. Focusing on the communicator
C. Going back to Maletzke's model, the

The field-schema of Mass Communication (Maletzke, 1963)

Excursus: The complexity of communication

In order to explain public communication "in stages" we shall consider Phillip Elliot's model[4], where he asserts that in social communication there are three autonomous, but interdependent subsystems: society as the source, mass media institutions and, again, society as the receiver:

Society as source →Mass media institutions →Society as receiver

Each of these subsystems borrows from the other what it needs to function, each has its own interests and ways to influence the others. These subsystems pursue different goals: The Society wants public compliance and integration of its members; the Receiver wants to improve the adaptation to reality by making use of the public messages, whereas Mass media are commercially oriented, viewing cultural products as goods for consumers.

Maletzke's model prefigures to some extent the

communicator is that entity which generates the content and the form of the public message depending on social, cultural and psychological factors. In other words, the messages of the communicators are influenced by their self-image, their personality, social position (both within a specific group and within society), by their social relations, by their audience, by the pressure of the public opinion, etc.

D. The message and the medium

The message reaches the receiver via mass media, in other words it is mediated by mass media. The construction of the message has to meet the requirements imposed by the communication medium Mass media, on the other hand, select the information coming from different sources and turn it into journalistic products in accordance with the public interest, but also with their internal interests. Technology has greatly influenced worldwide data transmission: not long ago, newspapers were conditioned by their daily frequency, and the topicality of subjects was rendered if the printed edition of one day reported about the events of the

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[4] Phillip Elliot, *The Making of a Television Series: A Case Study in the Sociology of Culture*, Constable, Somerset, 1972, *apud* Denis McQuail, *Comunicarea*, Institutul European, Iaşi, 199, p. 179.

previous day. The images from the field could not yet be transmitted from a distance; they had to be actually carried to the editorial office in order to be edited. It was also impossible for TV stations to broadcast unscheduled live events – accidents, catastrophes, unexpected events, etc. Back in the 1960s when Maletzke developed his theory, only radio stations could broadcast live, via telephones. Nevertheless, at that time only landlines were available. Since then, mass media technology has greatly evolved and the boundaries between transmission media have blurred. Now, when video telephony is available to any smartphone owner through Internet connection, it is hard to imagine how laborious the work in each type of media (newspapers, radio or television) used to be. The medium has also progressively impacted upon the form of messages, imposing the manner in which information is received, decoded and assimilated.

E. Focusing on the receiver

The receiver makes a selection from the mass media offer in accordance with his interests and influenced by psychological, sociological and cultural factors. Additionally, the receiver is influenced by his perception of a certain media institution. Maletzke does not include in the category of receivers only individuals, but also groups and institutions, especially when it comes to messages of public interest.

F. The relations among components

The communicator formulates the messages in accordance with their perception of the receiver and depending on the media institutions through which the messages will be broadcast to the public. This requires professionalism on behalf of the communicator who has the competencies to formulate messages appropriate for the media. The receiver will decode the message based on the image they have of the communicator and NOT based on how the message is reformulated by the media institution. In his scheme, Maletzke does not provide any information about the correlation between the form of the message and the way it is perceived. The receiver will respond to the message of the communicator by adapting their behaviour, but evading the media institution in this chain. Maletzke talks about para-feedback

when discussing the receiver's reactions to the performance of the media institution, and mentions the practice of sending letters to the editor as an illustration of poor feedback. The one-way flow of messages and the absence of real feedback had led several researchers to question whether we can still talk about communication in the case of mass communication.

The novelty of Maletzke's model lies in presenting the media as relay, and not as an autonomous communicator with own initiative and message. This model is to be interpreted only in the context of social communication. Thus, we can see the connection with the research carried out by the Munich School, whose most important representative, Hans Wagner[5], expands upon Maletzke's theory.

Excursus: Who was Maletzke?

In what follows, we shall explain why, despite its popularity, Maletzke's model did not generate a school of thought and why the research conducted in the same direction is so poor. For this purpose we shall review biographical details and common practices from the German scientific world[6].

Gerhard Maletzke (1922-2010) is a classic contributor to the communication field and all scientific work dealing with mass communication today refers to his model. In fact, Maletzke ranks among the five most influential authors in communication sciences, along with Paul Lazarsfeld, Ellisabeth Noelle-Neumann, Juergen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann.[7] (This ranking may be surprising for Romanian readers since neither

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[5] Hans Wagner: Verstehende Methoden in der Kommunikationswissenschaft. München: Reinhard Fischer, 1999 (*apud* Ute Nawratil/Philomen Schönhagen/ Heinz Starkulla jr. (Hrsg.): Medien und Mittler sozialer Kommunikation. Beiträge zu Theorie, Geschichte und Kritik von Journalismus und Publizistik. Festschrift für Hans Wagner. Leipzig: Universitätsverlag, 2002.)

[6] For documentation we refered to: 1. The interview given by G. Maletzke to Professor Rüdiger Steinmetz, PhD, in 2002, which can be accessed at: http://www.kmw.uni-leipzig.de/ bereiche/medienwissenschaft/service/interview-gerhard-maletzke.html and to the article: Michael Meyen, Maria Löblich: Gerhard Maletzke: Eine Geschichte von Erfolg und Misserfolg in der Kommunikationswissenschaft. In: M edien&Kommunikationswissenschaft 59. Jg. (2011), S. 563-580, which can be accessed at https://www.researchgate.net/ publication/272779746 (accessed 12.12.2016)

[7] Biographisches Lexikon der Kommmunikationswissenschaft, http://blexkom.halemverlag.de (accessed 12.12.2016).

Luhmann nor Maletzke have been translated. Nonetheless, the two authors have been widely cited in Romanian research, from secondary sources. Maletzke's analyses are grounded in psychology, which he studied along with philosophy and journalism at Hamburg after returning from the battlefield. The researcher's detractors accused him of being a member of Hitlerjugend or Hitler Youth during World War II. Maletzke argued that he had volunteered in order to be allowed to choose his branch and thus he avoided becoming cannon fodder in the infantry. He served for six years in the war and he was wounded three times.

In 1983 Maletzke became a visiting professor at the University of Stuttgart / Hohenheim. He had a so-called Honorarprofessur and taught communication sciences and journalism. In the 70s he also taught intercultural communication, especially during his internship in Singapore, and in the 80s he was a media expert (Medienreferent) at the Broadcast Company in Stuttgart SDR (Sueddeutscher Rundfunk). The German researcher has never acquired academic tenure; therefore, he did not have the chance to be part of a research team or to make disciples, which might be an explanation for the fact that Maletzke's theory has not generated a school of thought.

He applied for a professor position at the University of Hamburg, but he was rejected for political reasons being considered a Socialist sympathizer during the Cold War. This verdict case of political discrimination has been considered a stain on the academic practices in Germany.

The popularity of a theory often depends on the time of its launching, on the position and reputation of its author and, of course, on the attitude of the academia. The enthusiastic or hostile reception of a theory is often determined by the social–political context, by the fashionable scientific criteria at a certain moment, and by games of power and interests. Popularity thus depends not only on the intrinsic value of a theory, but also on social acceptance.

Further research in the field

In 1997, the Viennese Professor Roland Burkart, a specialist in communication theories and political communication, further developed Maletzke's model. Burkart addressed the effects of mass communication and adapted Maletzke's model for digital communication, showing that the Internet is not part of a linear evolution of mass communication. According to Burkart, the Internet represents a new, distinct form of communication, especially due to its interactivity and instantaneous transmission of information. Burkart simplified Maletzke's model making it similar again to the original source of inspiration, namely, Lasswell's general model of communication (1948). However, he replaced the medium with the Internet.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNITY
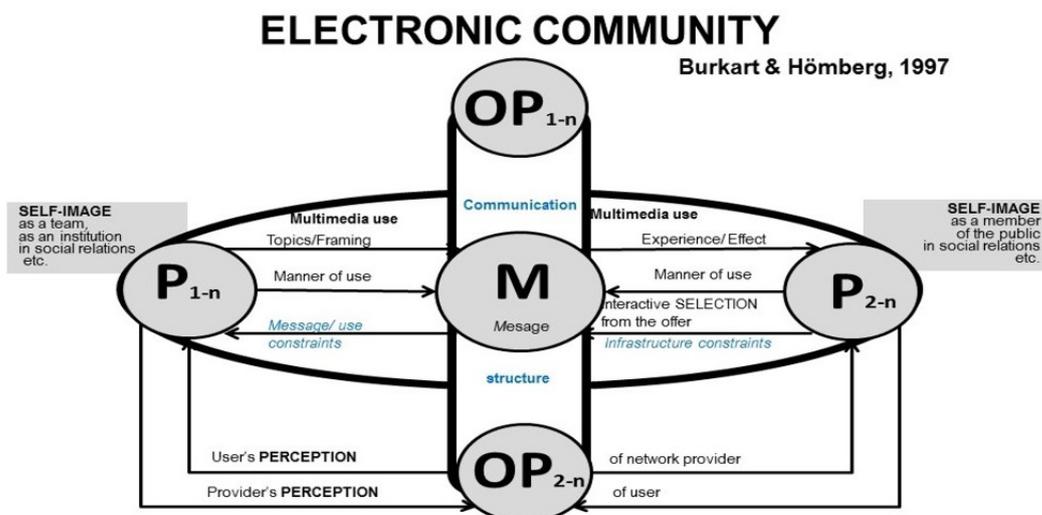
irreversibly affected his teaching career because it negatively influenced the attitude of the entire German academia. Later on, posthumously, this

The Austrian researcher speaks about *electronic community* in opposition with the sociological standpoint according to which the

interactions of communicators on the Internet do not meet the necessary standards to transform the participants into a community. Bukart rejects the message pre-positioning separately from the medium. As stated by Bukart, the communicator delivers his message in the virtual environment and the public make the selection. The researcher refers to public messages and demonstrates that the communication structures in the virtual environment regulate the communication of social actors. The digital communication processes take place via a technological medium and the messages are not filtered by any agent.

Bukart's scheme does not specify how the medium controls the communication processes or whether interactivity, which involves the exchange of roles among participants, makes online communication different from previous forms of communication.

Final remarks

Maletzke's theory has attracted a lot of criticism with regard to methodology, more precisely to the fact that the criteria used in developing the model are not consistent and unified.

Nonetheless, many elements of Gerhard Maletzke's scientific work are to be found later on in the theories proposed by German researchers such as Niklas Luhmann, Jürgen Habermas, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and several others.

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