THEORETICAL FEATURES REGARDING THE EVOLUTION OVER TIME OF THE MAIN COMMUNICATION MODELS USED FOR THE STUDY OF MASS COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

In the context of increasingly accelerated development of technology and particularly of the Internet, mass communication acquires new meanings. This article proposes a brief theoretical approach to the study of mass communication as it was treated in the specific literature of the 50s and 60s, when there was little talk about new technologies. However, many features identified since then still retain their topicality and for this reason it is interesting to note the evolution over time of the main communication models that were and some of them still are used for the study of mass communication. They are relevant to the context in which a complete study of mass communication is required, not only from the perspective of the present, but also from the period in which it was outlined. Thus, this article is divided into three main sections: the first part represents the meaning of communication in a general sense, so that the second part to represent the mass communication process and its characteristics, and the last part to represent the main models of communication in the order in which they have occurred, and especially aiming at new features that each of them brought.

Keywords: *communication, marketing communication, mass communication, communication models.*

1. Introduction

Communication has rapidly developed even since the old ages. It was initially supported by the Greeks, because „for them, the art of words, meaning the science to build one's speach and to express it in the agora, was a prerequisite for citizenship status"[1], and then by the Romans who „developed the communication study and improved the speech in order to increase the influence of the discourse on the listeners"[2].

From the etymological point of view, the noun *communication* comes from Latin, where the word *comunicatio* means conversation, and the verb *to communicate,* also originating from Latin, i.e. *comunico*, means *to share (with smb.)* or *to be in connection (with)[3]*. Thus, as the word is defined by the Dictionary of the Romanian Language[4] the approach to share with somebody (your thoughts, ideas and feelings) is the result of a communicating action. As the society continued to develop, the word communication has expanded its meaning, and now when it comes to communication, we will not only refer to the transmission of information, but to the entire set of interactions that are based on

communication or, in other words – *communication is inevitable!* – the first axiom of the School of Palo Alto[5]. Basically, this means that regardless of the presence or absence of intentionality, „all behavior has a certain communicative value"[6], and non-communication is impossible.

In this context, the objective of the paper is to present the development models used in mass communication, with the improvements brought by each model, depending on the evolution of the communication study.

2. Definitions, components and features of the mass communication process

In a very general sense and very true at the same time, the communication „is a condition of life […] begins at birth and continues until death"[7], so „human relations (and not only they) represent communicational interactions"[8].

Osgood said that „one speaks of communication whenever a system or a source affects another system, in this case a recipient, by manipulation of alternative symbols which can be transmitted over the channel that connects them"[9].

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[1] Vasile Tran and Irina Stănciugelu, *Teoria comunicării (second edition)* (Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2003), 12.

[2] Ioana Cecilia Popescu, *Comunicarea în marketing* (Bucharest: Uranus, 2003), 28.

[3] Guțu, 1983 apud Ibidem, 12.

[4] Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române, 1996 apud Ibidem, 12.

[5] Watzlawick, 1972 apud Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 56.

[6] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 56.

[7] Jean Lohisse, Comunicarea: de la transmitere mecanică la interacțiune (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 75.

[8] Ioan Drăgan, *Paradigme ale comunicării de masă* (Bucharest: Șansa, 1996), 7.

[9] Osgood, 1957 apud Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 12.

From another perspective, capturing its procedural character, John J. Burnett defines communication as „a process by which two or more people try using symbols to exert a conscious or unconscious influence on others in order to meet their own interests"[10]. Abric[11] also defines communication in the same tone, when he says that it is a very dynamic social act, voluntarily or involuntarily, subsumed under „a process of mutual influence between several stakeholders".

There can be seen how the above definitions have at least two common elements: *communication is a process by which information, opinions, beliefs, etc are transmitted* – between individuals or groups; regardless of the context in which we find ourselves every day, *we cannot live without communicating[12]*.

2.1. Definitions of mass communication

In terms of mass communication, there are several definitions in the literature which also reveals a few common features of mass communication: it is an organized process, where the communicator (an organization) addresses a broad audience by using specific technical means.

Thus, Wright states that, „mass communication is addressed to relatively large, heterogeneous and anonymous audiences: messages are transmitted to the public, often organized over time, in order to reach the majority of members of the public at the same time; they (the messages) are evanescent; the communicator tends to be a comprehensive organization or to operate as such, and it may involve significant costs"[13].

Like Wright, Freidson[14] highlights how „mass communication can be distinguished from other types of communication by being addressed to a large part of the population, rather than to one or a few people, or to a special part of the population. In addition, it essentially involves the presence of certain technical means of handling, so that communication can reach at the same time all individuals concerned."

Lazar[15] defines mass communication as „an organized social process. Those who work for the media, be it a newspaper or a TV channel, are part of a large enterprise in society. The independent journalist image isolated in front of his typewriter is nowadays out of fashion. Every journalist, whether working for a newspaper, a radio or TV station,

belongs to an employees' group in the said company and performs a well-defined work in the sense of teamwork".

In another more comprehensive definition, mass communications are viewed as "a form of social communication very distinct from the communication between individuals or groups"[16]. Fodor and Szecsko consider that mass communications are characterized mainly by their massiveness, heterogeneity and by the use of technical means. According to Fodor and Szecsko, the massiveness of communication systems is manifested in three ways. Firstly, they circulate the information, culture, entertainment in massive quantities; furthermore, their messages are addressed to the public masses. Finally, "the manufacturing techniques for producing the communication content can be assimilated to a certain degree, by the techniques of industrial mass production"[17]. The second characteristic of mass communications is its heterogeneous nature, which manifests both by content and by their audiences: their messages differ in quality, form, their coding system, their function; they are addressed to members of all social classes, whatever their cultura level, the nature of their interests and their lifestyle. The third characteristic assumes that "the one communicating the message is not directly related to the one who receives it, them being separated by technical means"[18].

In order to distinguish the important role played by mass communication and the difference between this and the other communication forms, we shall still remember, in short, some classifications of communication forms that are based on criteria such as: *messaging technique* and *how individuals participate in the communication process[19]*.

Depending on the *messaging technique[20]*, there are two forms of communication: *direct communication* (based on personal direct relationships between individuals) and *indirect communication* (which is achieved by means of technical devices that mediate communication).

In the second classification that takes into account *how the individual/individuals are participating in the communication process*, there are three types of communication[21]: *intrapersonal communication* (is the communication performed with hiself/herself or the inner dialogue of the

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[10] Burnett, 1988 *apud* Popescu, Ibidem, 14.

[11] Jean-Claude Abric, *Psihologia comunicării: teorii şi metode* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2002), 15.

[12] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 11.

[13] Wright, 1959 *apud* Drăgan, Ibidem, 42.

[14] Freidson, 1954 *apud* Drăgan, Ibidem, 42.

[15] Lazar, 1991 *apud* Drăgan, Ibidem, p. 42.

[16] Fodor and Szecsko, 1974 *apud* Drăgan, Ibidem, 49

[17] Fodor and Szecsko, 1974 *apud* Drăgan, Ibidem, 49.

[18] Fodor and Szecsko, 1974 *apud* Drăgan, Ibidem, 49.

[19] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 18.

[20] Drăgan, Ibidem, 18.

[21] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 18.

individual), *interpersonal communication* (is the immediate, direct communication, conducted by individuals who are "face to face") and *mass communication* (is the communication performed for a large audience by specialized institutions in this regard).

One can easily guess just by the classifications and definitions as mentioned above that mass communication needs both specialized equipment and people. Next, we shall specify in detail the characteristics of mass communication and how it differs from other types of communication.

2.2. Features and components of the mass communication process

Based on the *key elements without which communication* would not take place (a transmitter, a channel, a message, a receiver, the relationship between transmitter and receiver, the effect, the context in which communication occurs and the things that messages refer to)[22] we can distinguish the role and characteristics of each of them when we particularly refer to mass communication.

Therefore, unlike the interpersonal communication, in the case of mass communication, for example the transmitter of the message is an "institutionalized person"[23], meaning that a person who is part of a larger group of people, who share a common point of view, is the communication organization: media group, radio station, TV station etc. and has the endorsement of that institution. Furthermore, we do not talk about the flow of information that reaches from a transmitter to a receiver, but from one or more transmitters always to more receivers. Thus, „communication is socialized, becomes collective"[24], because as broadcasters are institutions made up of groups of several individuals, the receptors of messages are great communities of people and this leads to audience socialization[25]. Communication is "directed at a wide audience, heterogeneous and anonymous [...] messages are sent to the public, most often planned in order to simultaneously reach the audience members"[26]. A third characteristic of mass communication is its mediated feature. If in the interpersonal communication, there is a direct communication, mass communication would not be possible without technological assitance. Therefore, the channel plays a very important role as transmitters and receivers are separated by space

limitations. The presence of a relay that technically facilitates the transmission of information gives to mass communication an indirect nature[27]. As regarding the receptors' feed-back and the effect of messages upon them, receptors' response is overdue, meaning it occurs with some delay.

3. The evolution over time of the main communication models used in the study of mass communication

Starting from the **Harold D. Lasswell's classic formula** (1948), one of the first and perhaps the most famous model of mass communication, due to its simplicity, any communication act must provide answers to the following questions: *Who says? what? In what channel? To whom? With what effect?*[28]

These questions translated into a graphic form, create the model shown below (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 Lasswell's Formula. Elements corresponding to the communication process
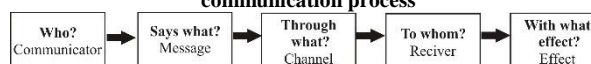
Source: McQuail & Windahl, 2004, p. 19

For each question, Lasswell identified one field of research. Thus, „according to him, the first chapter is *the control analysis*, i.e. the study of factors that initiate and control the communication process (editors, communicators' groups, the organization and role of media institutions); the second consists of *analysing* the *content* of communication, i.e. the study of messages and their direction; the third refere to communication *channels* (print newspapers, cinema, radio, television, video etc.) The fourth chapter concerns the *audience* and and how to receive messages, and the fifth includes the *analysis of effects* and of media *effectiveness*"[29].

With all the criticism and improvements later brought upon this model – concerning the absence of feed-back and the fact that it leads the specialist towards distinct fields of research although they interrelate[30], it should be stressed that, at that time, Lasswell drew the directions that mass communication research should focus on[31], especially considering that the author was interested in political communication and therefore in

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[22] Denis McQuail and Sven Windahl, *Modele ale comunicării pentru studiul comunicării de masă* (Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2004), 12.
[23] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 119.
[24] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 119.
[25] Voyenne, 1962 *apud* Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 119.
[26] Wright, 1959 *apud* Werner J. Severin and James W. Tankard, Jr. *Perspective asupra teoriilor comunicării de masă* (Iași: Polirom, 2004.), 16.
[27] Drăgan, Ibidem, 44.
[28] McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 19.
[29] Drăgan, Ibidem, 50-51.
[30] Braddock, 1958 *apud* McQuail & Windahl, Ibidem, 20.
[31] Paul Dobrescu and Alina Bârgăoanu, *Mass media şi societatea* (second edition) (Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2003), 121.

persuasion. Consequently, Lasswell's formula remains the reference in this field, as the first model of mass communication.

The communication model achieved by **Schramm** together with **Osgood** (Fig. 2) participated in the formation of the idea that „everyone in the communication process is both source and recipient of the message"[32]. Thus, the model captures two key processes that take place almost simultaneously durig the communication process: encoding and decoting the the message. The message encoding involves the transposition of signs and symbols in messages, while decoting refers to the accurate interpretation of messages[33].

Fig. 2 Components of the communication model developed by Schramm
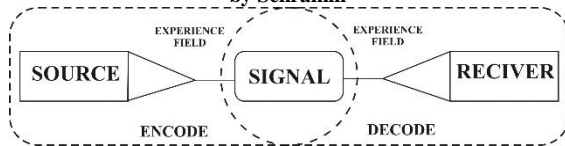
Source: Nadolu, 2007, p. 68

In order for that process to take place under optimal conditions, it must meet several conditions. It is necessary that the „source has accurate and unambiguous information; it should be accurately coded into communicable signs and thus be transformed into a clear message; the message should reach the receiver in its authentic form, and here it must be decoded according to the coding model. Otherwise, the receiver does not respond in accordance with communicator's project, which means that the system does not work"[34]. Then, coding and deconding the messages occurs depending on the *experience field* of each of the participants. The experience field is defined through „the knowledge, symbols, information, attitudes of the two <<links>>"[35]. Therefore, both the source (transmitter) and the recipient (receiver), who later turns into a transmitter, should take into account during the coding process of the elements present in the experience of the other one, because the accuracy in decoding the message is directly proportional to the area of intersection of previous experience of the two. „When the *area of intersection* of the two *experience fields* is *large*, communication is facilitated; if the intersection is *very small*, the communication becomes very difficult (applicable to people from different cultures), and when there is no intersection, the communication becomes practically

impossible"[36]. An important and new element also introduced by this model, translates into the capacity of a person to be the interpreter of messages. It encodes and decodes messages at the same time; it is both transmitter and receiver, and when he changes from the receiver position into the transmitter, he may provide *feed-backs*. The feed-back is a new concept introduced by this model and it represents the response reaction, whereby the positions are reversed. In mass communication, the feed-back is given by the audience through phone calls, e-mails, letters etc. in response to the treatment of a subject, for instance.

Another novelty introduced by this model is to *multiply the communication channels*. When we refer to direct interpersonal communication, we are able to say how a message can be transmitted in several ways, or through multiple channels such as: facial expression, the tonality in which the message is transmitted, emphasizing certain words etc. In mass communication, multiplying channels is customized according to the transmission media. For instance, in newspapers, „such multiplicity is displayed by: the wording of the news; headlines and size of headlines; information, reports, aticles layout on pages; inserted images; used fonts etc."[37]. This could be, in Schramm's opinion, a mass manipulation technique[38].

The communication model created by **George Gerbner** (Fig. 3) and introduced in 1956 is qualitatively distinguished from the previous thanks to the innovation it brings: „first of all, it links the message to the "reality" it represents, which facilitates the discussion of the issues of perception and understanding; secondly, it sees communication as a process consisting of two alternating dimensions: the *perceptive* (or receiving) one and the *communication* one (the size of transmission and control method)"[39].

On the other hand, the model is flexible enough to be used for a variety of communication circumstances, from interpersonal communication to mass communication.

Thus, starting from Lasswell's formula and analyzing the graphic representation of the model (Fig. 3) we may say that the model shows how: *1. someone, 2. perceives an event and 3. reacts, 4. in a given situation, 5. by using certain means 6. in order to make available 7. in a certain form and 8. in a certain context, 9. a specific content 10. that has certain consequences*[40].

[32] Lohisse, Ibidem, 90.

33 Ioan Drăgan, 1996 apud Bogdan Nadolu, Sociologia comunicării de masă (Timișoara: Excelsior Art, 2007), 68.

34 Drăgan, Ibidem, 31.

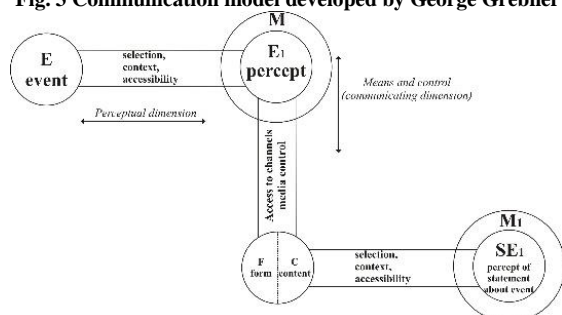35 Drăgan, Ibidem, 31.

36 Drăgan, Ibidem, 31.

37 Drăgan, Ibidem, 31.

38 Drăgan, Ibidem, 33.

39 Dumitru Borțun and Teodor Borșa, Semiotica vizualului - academic course (2004), 36.

40 McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 27; Drăgan, Ibidem, 35.

Fig. 3 Communication model developed by George Grebner

Source: Tran & Stănciugelu, 2003, p. 43

Thus, the concepts that Gerbner introduces in his model are „the perception, production, messages' meaning; the message as a unit of form and content; the notion of intersubjectivity as an expression of the ratio between the messages output, perception of events and messages"[41].

As it is graphically represented, on the two axes, the model shows how the perception of the event determines the communication process. Thus, following the above staging, here's how Gerbner's model can be described.

On the horizontal axis (perceptual size), there is M's perception - man or machine, on the event (E) - natural event or publicized event. Event's perception (E₁) is M's *reaction* that occurs *in a certain situation* and that involves *"a link between the event and its sensorial, cognitive and creative reorganization by M"[42].* In turn, the situation may influence how the reaction and reception occurs. It has "psychological, physical and social dimensions. Between E (the event) and E₁ (the perception, message) come:

- the selection action;
- the event accesibility (possibility of being perceived);
- the context in which it occurs"[43].

On the vertical axis (the size of the communication) it is describes the process by which, at this stage, the perception turns into the message. The message (or signal) is graphically represented in the circle divided into two (SE). The content (half circle denoted by E) can be communicated in several ways (S). It is important to find the most appropriate form (S) for the content to be communicated (E). This is the axis "of the means used for creation, transmission and distribution of messages"[44]. The access to communication channels is based on certain criteria, such as the importance of the subject,

but "the actual selection will be made by a communication *medium* and by the one controlling it"[45].

In the third stage of the model there is described how the perception (SE₁) of another recipient (M₁) about SE (i.e. the message sent by M) is born. So M₁ is not directly related to the event (E), but to its description (SE) and thus the perception (SE₁) was born. The manner in which the second recipient interacts with the message determines its perception.

In terms of mass media communication, this model enables us to understand the variety of factors and processes that intervene between the actual events and their communication as well as the extent to which the media content is understood by the audience[46].

Considering the differences between mass communication and the interpersonal communication, and based on both the communication model developed by Newcomb and on the theories of balance and dynamic correlation of Heider[47], **Westley** and **MacLean** developed a new model of communication that draws attention to some important features of mass communication.

Thus, the mass communication differs from interpersonal communication in that for the mass communication "feed-back is minimal or delayed; there is a greater number of A (alternative media source) and X (objects in the external environment) which a given person B (the audience member) must relate to and of which he/she must choose"[48].

Graphically represented in two stages (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5), the model shows us how in the first stage (Fig. 4), A and B, the interpersonal communication actors interact. It is a classic model of communication in which A selects between multiple objects (X₁, X₂, X₃) forming the environment of the two, the ones that he/she must communicate to B. X' is the message sent by A to B. At the same time B has also access to the same objects (X₁B), therefore, he/she can search by himself/herself for information and provide feedback (fBA) to A.

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[41] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 43.
[42] Drăgan, Ibidem, 36.
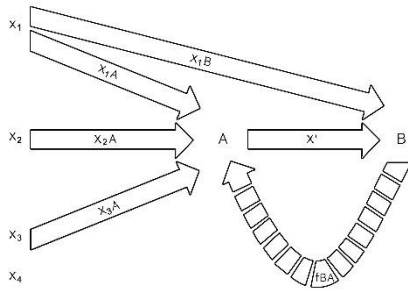[43] Tran and Stănciugelu, Ibidem, 44.
[44] Drăgan, Ibidem, 36.
[45] Borțun and Borșa, Ibidem, 37.
[46] Gerbner, 1964 *apud* McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 30.
[47] McQuail and Windhal, Ibidem, 38.
[48] McQuail and Windhal, Ibidem, 39.

Fig. 4 The first stage of the model, in which A selects between the potential X objects those which shall be provided/communicated to B

Source: McQuail & Windahl, 2004, p. 40

In the second stage, there comes a new element: the communication channel (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 The conceptual model of mass communication developed by Westley and MacLean
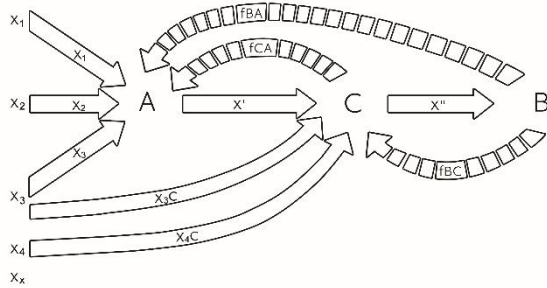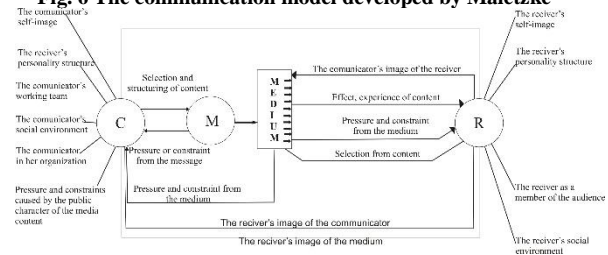

Source: McQuail & Windahl, 2004, p. 40

From the perspective of mass communication the model can be explained as follows[49]:

– X1, X2, X3, X4, X5 are the environmental objects (events) which translate into topics of communication (e.g. political crises, presidential elections, election results, etc.);

– A is the communicator – he/she/it can be an individual or an institution/organization;

– B is the audience (individual or group of individuals) who need the information;

– C is the media organization that filters the messages which A transmits to B, depending on B's interests and concerns;

– X' represents the event that the channel (C) selects for transmission to the receiver (B), but not before it is transformed by the media institution (C) into the message to be communicated (X") to the audience.

– X3C and X4C are the comments which the media institution (C) makes directly on the events (X), by the reporter (e.g. reporting from the scene);

– fBA is the feed-back provided by the audience (B) directly to A (it can be a political vote or purchasing a product, if it is a reaction to advertising);

– fBC is the feed-back provided by the audience to the channel (the feed-back of the viewers of a TV show, of the listeners of a radio station, etc.);

– fCA is the feed-back which the transmitter A receives from the media institution (C). It can be for stimulating, changing, or blocking A.

– The importance of the model lies in several important aspects that distinguish it from previous models, in that:

– it emphasises the importance of feed-back which the auditors provides either to the channel (C), either directly to the source (A);

– it captures one of the most important functions of the media (C), that of the selection of topics based on the relevance they have for the audience;

– it emphasizes the flexibility of the relations between audience (B) and event (X) or source (A), in that that the media (C) does not monopolize such direct relationships which the receiver may have. Thus, the receiver can become, in turn, a source of information.

The model created by **Maletzke** (Fig. 6) in 1963 it was described in his book, Psychologie der Massenkommunikation[50].

Fig. 6 The communication model developed by Maletzke

Source: McQuail & Windahl, 2004, p. 49

In essence, the model includes the same specific key elements of all types of communication: a transmitter, a receiver, the message and the means of communication. Differences occur as follows:

– the author identifies between the means of communication and the receiver two factors that influence how the receiver receives the message - the pressures and constraints of the means of communication, on the one hand, and the image the receiver has about the means of communication, on the other. While the limitations of the communication media relate to media features, the image which the receiver has about the media of communication is influencing the expectations related to the media content. The content selection and how the receiver perceives contents are consequences of the communication media's prestige. Besides the variables related to the communication channel, there are other variables described in the model, also called independent

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[49] Drăgan, Ibidem, 46-47; McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 39-42.
[50] Maletzke, 1963 *apud* McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 49.

variables, and that influence the perception of the messages: self-image of the receiver, the personality structure of the receiver and the social context in which the reception occurs.

– Another important element of the model is "the communicational behavior of the transmitter"[51], i.e. how the transmitter will select and structure the messages to be transmitted. In this process the transmitter must take into account, on the one hand, the pressures and constraints of the message (as the message form must be adapted to content) and on the other hand, the pressures and constraints of the means of communication. Likewise, as for the receiver, there are several factors involved (independent variables), such as: the self-image of the transmitter, his/her/its personality structure, transmitter's position as part of a team and, at the same time, as part of an organization, as well as the pressures and constraints relating to the public nature of the media message.

The model also highlights the importance of forming an image of the transmitter on the receiver and vice-versa, and in the context of the mass communication it is even more difficult to sketch this image in transmitter's mind, given how receivers are regarded as a heterogeneous and anonymous mass[52]. The absence of spontaneous feed-back characteristic to interpersonal communication also makes it difficult for the transmitter to form an image on the audience.

3. Conclusions

The need for communication, the emergence of new technology that streamlines the communication process and the speed with which the changes take place in all areas affecting the process of mass communication, leads us to affirm about mass communication that it "coexists and interacts with other communication forms and processes"[53]. Thus, with the advent of the Internet we talk about a communication "addressed to an active audience, where the consumer is considered a partner and not just a final target"[54]. On the other hand, feedback methods have diversified and audience rapidity of reaction is no longer a problem. Therefore, it should be stressed that the mass communication process is not linear, but it is based on gaining and maintaining the public attention[55]. As it was seen in the description of the model developed by Westley and MacLean, the communicator must relate to the audience and construe its needs.

All these changes highlight the dynamics of the communication process. Therefore, by presenting the models used in the study of mass communication, this article brings many significant theoretical contributions in the field of communication: Lasswell's communication model or formula, Schramm's communication model, the communication model developed by George Gerbner, the communication model developed by Westley and MacLean and, not at least, the model developed by Maletzke.

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[51] McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 46.
[52] McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 47.
[53] McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 9.
[54] Otilia-Elena Platon, Rolul comunicării de marketing online prin social media în susţinerea capitalului mărcii, (Ph.D. thesis), 2015, 17.
[55] McQuail and Windahl, Ibidem, 15.

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