International Journal of
Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences

e-ISSN : 3026-0892
p-ISSN : 3026-1422

Index : Harvard, Boston, Sydney, Dimensions, Lens, Scilit, Semantic, Google, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/IJHESS.v2i1.2547

IMPACT OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM, PRAGMATISM AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM ON COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA PRACTICE

Uduak Udoudom[1*], Borono Bassey[2], Kufre George[3], Samuel Etifit[4]
[1,3,4]Heritage Polytechnic, Eket, Nigeria; [2]University of Uyo, Nigeria
godsonud@gmail.com; boronobassey@gmail.com

Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Jan 1, 2024	Jan 8, 2024	Jan 11, 2024	Jan 14, 2024

Abstract

As communication technologies and media platforms continue to evolve, there is a growing need to re-examine the theoretical paradigms underpinning our understanding of human interaction and meaning-making. This research elucidates the enduring relevance of three sociological perspectives—Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism—for making sense of contemporary communication landscapes. Employing a qualitative meta-synthesis methodology, we analysed 50 academic articles and book chapters discussing applications of these perspectives within communication and media studies. Our analysis reveals how core concepts from each tradition—including symbolic meaning-making, practical consequences of communication, socially constructed representations—contain explanatory power for grasping new communication patterns and challenges brought by digitalization. Researchers apply Symbolic Interactionist notions of symbolic cues and improvised self-presentations to study computer-mediated communication and social media self-constructions. Pragmatist views on communicative actions as tools for desired ends inform critical analyses of fake news propagation and disinformation campaigns. Social Constructionist emphasis on mass media representations shaping shared realities has expanded to deconstructions of algorithmically-curated information environments. By elucidating these and other linkages, our study aims to revitalize engagement with forgotten or overlooked theoretical foundations in order to advance communication scholarship and enhance reflexivity within emergent media ecosystems. We

IJHESS Journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

conclude that integrating insights from Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism remains vitally important, both for scholarly aims of explaining reality and practical aims of consciously shaping it.

Keywords: Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, Social Constructionism, Communication

INTRODUCTION

Symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, and social constructionism are three related theories in the field of sociology and the social sciences that provide different perspectives on how we understand and construct our social reality. As Denzin (2014) notes, the merger of three streams of thought into a unified perspective on information technologies and social structure defines the pragmatic, interactionist contribution to the study of the media. Each of these three streams of thought can be applied to communication and media practice in different ways. Also, each of these perspectives offers unique insights into how communication and media are constructed and how they impact social reality.

Evidently, communication and media have undergone significant transformations in recent decades, influenced not only by technological advancements but also by theoretical paradigms that illuminate the intricacies of human interaction (Cemikovaite and Mitkute, 2023). Symbolic Interactionism, rooted in the works of George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley, posits that meaning is constructed through social interaction and communication. Pragmatism, with its philosophical roots in the works of William James and John Dewey, emphasizes the practical consequences of ideas and actions. Social Constructionism, drawing from various disciplines, explores how social phenomena are constructed through language and discourse (Axelrad, 2015).

Symbolic interactionism (SI), according to Low and Thomson (2021), is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the importance of symbols and their meanings in social interaction. According to SI, we give meaning to media messages and other forms of communication based on our social interactions and the cultural symbols we share (Casino and Thien, 2020). Simply put, in communication and media practice, symbolic interactionism can be applied to understand how individuals use symbols to create meaning and interact with others. In the context of media studies, symbolic interactionism can be applied to explore how media symbols are created, interpreted, and negotiated by

individuals and groups (Wang, 2023). For example, a news story or a political campaign can be analyzed through the lens of symbolic interactionism to understand how symbols are used to create and reinforce certain meanings and values. That means, when we interpret a political ad or news article, we draw on our shared understanding of symbols like "freedom" or "justice" to make sense of the message.

Houser (2010) explains pragmatism as a broad philosophic attitude toward our conceptualization of experience. Pragmatism is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the practical aspects of knowledge and action (Gudykunst and Lee, 2002). In communication and media practice, pragmatism can be applied to understand how media technologies and communication practices are used to achieve specific goals. This perspective emphasizes the importance of studying the social consequences of media technologies and practices, and the role of media in shaping social reality. According to pragmatism, our communication and media practices are shaped by the problems we face and the goals we have in mind (Remmling, 2020). For example, a news producer might choose to cover a particular story because they believe it will appeal to their audience and help them achieve their ratings goals. Also, a social media campaign can be analyzed through the lens of pragmatism to understand how it is designed and implemented to achieve specific communication goals.

Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in the construction of knowledge and reality (Triplett, 2016). According to social constructionism, our communication and media practices are not fixed or objective, but are rather shaped by our social interactions and cultural context. For example, the way we define "news" or "entertainment" is not inherent in the content itself, but rather reflects our social and cultural norms and values. In other words, social constructionism can be applied to understand how media messages and communication practices construct social reality and shape public discourse (Num, Aizuddin, Tong and Said, 2023). For example, media coverage of social issues can be analyzed through the lens of social constructionism to understand how it constructs and reinforces certain social norms and values.

While numerous studies have explored each of these theoretical perspectives individually, a comprehensive examination of their combined influence on communication and media practices is still limited. Existing research has primarily focused on applying

these theories in specific contexts or analyzing their individual contributions to understanding social phenomena. This study seeks to bridge this gap by synthesizing insights from Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism to provide a more holistic understanding of their collective impact on communication and media practices.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, examining how these three theoretical perspectives intersect and contribute to the evolving landscape of communication and media. The primary objectives of this research are twofold. First, to analyze the individual contributions of Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism to communication and media practices. Second, to investigate the synergies and tensions that arise when these theoretical perspectives intersect, exploring how they collectively shape the dynamics of communication in the digital age. By achieving these objectives, this study aims to offer insights that can inform both theoretical discourse and practical applications within the fields of communication and media studies.

Conceptual Clarifications

1. Symbolic Interactionism: An Overview

Symbolic Interactionism is a sociological theory that explains how individuals create, interpret, and assign meaning to symbols and how these symbols shape their social interactions (Casino and Thien, 2020). The theory posits that individuals engage in ongoing social interactions through language and other forms of communication, which allows them to develop shared meanings and understandings of the world around them (Remmling, 2020). The theory was developed by George Herbert Mead, a philosopher and sociologist, and his followers in the early 20th century. Mead believed that individuals construct their sense of self through their interactions with others and that this process is ongoing and dynamic. Mead's ideas were later developed and expanded upon by other scholars, including Herbert Blumer, who coined the term "symbolic interactionism" to describe the theory.

Blumer (1969 in Handberg et al., 2014) refer to two forms of social interaction: “the conversation of gestures” and “the use of significant symbols.” The first, according to Blumer, was a “non-symbolic interaction” based on the fact that no interpretation in response to meaning is taking place. It is like a reflex action without actual thinking

involved. In contrast, the second, "the use of significant symbols," is considered a "symbolic interaction" in that an interpretation is taking place in response to meaning. By this, we come to recognize that the person is responding to acts on basis of what the gesture or action means. In SI terms, we conclude that actual understanding occurs when this gesture or action has the same meaning and significance for two persons (Handberg et al., 2014).

a. Interactionist assumptions

In its canonical form (Blumer, l969 in Denzin, 2014), symbolic interactionism rests on the following root assumptions. First, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, l969, p. 2 in Denzin 2014). Second, the meanings of things arise out of the process of social interaction. Third, meanings are modified through an interpretive process that involves self-reflective individuals symbolically interacting with one another (Blumer, l969, p. 2 in Denzin, 2014). Fourth, human beings create the worlds of experience in which they live. Fifth, the meanings of these worlds come from interaction, and they are shaped by the self-reflections that persons bring to their situations. Sixth, such self-reflection is "interwoven with social interaction and influences that social interaction" (Blumer, 1981, p. 153). Seventh, joint acts, their formation, dissolution, conflict and merger, constitute what Blumer calls the "social life of a human society." A society consists of the joint or social acts "which are formed and carried out by [its] members" (Blumer, 1981, p. 153 in Denzin, 2014, p. 76). Eighth, a complex interpretive process shapes the meanings that things have for human beings. This process is anchored in the cultural world, in the "circuit of culture" (du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997, p. 3 in Denzin, op cit.), where meanings are defined by the mass media – advertising, cinema, and television. This process is based on the articulation or interconnection of several distinct and contingent processes (Denzin, 2014).

b. Key concepts: symbols, meanings, self, and society

Key concepts in symbolic interactionism include symbols, meanings, self, and society. **Symbols** are any object or action that has a shared meaning among people, such as words, gestures, or facial expressions. **Meanings** are the interpretations that individuals assign to symbols, which are shaped by their social and cultural context. The **self** refers to an individual's sense of identity, which is formed and influenced by their interactions with

others. **Society** refers to the larger social structures and institutions that shape individuals' experiences and interactions (Azarian, 2021; Austin and Huang, 2015).

c. Role of language and communication in creating meaning

Language and communication play a critical role in creating and maintaining shared meanings and understandings in symbolic interactionism. Through language, individuals are able to communicate their interpretations of symbols and negotiate their meanings with others. This ongoing process of negotiation helps to shape social interactions and create shared understandings of the world.

d. Micro-level analysis of social interactions

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory, which means that it focuses on individual-level interactions rather than larger social structures and institutions. The theory emphasizes the importance of studying everyday interactions and practices to understand how social meaning is created and maintained.

e. Criticisms and limitations of the theory

Critics of symbolic interactionism argue that the theory has limitations in its ability to explain larger social structures and inequalities, such as those related to race, gender, and class. They also argue that the theory is too focused on individual-level interactions and may overlook the larger social and cultural context that shapes those interactions. However, proponents of symbolic interactionism argue that the theory provides a valuable perspective on how individuals navigate and create meaning in their daily lives.

f. Application to Current Communication Practices

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical framework that examines how individuals interact with each other and create meaning through communication (Salvini, 2010). It is often used in the field of sociology to study human behaviour and communication patterns. In terms of current communication practices, symbolic interactionism can provide insights into how people use symbols, language, and gestures to create and interpret meaning.

One example of the application of symbolic interactionism to current communication practices is in the study of **social media**. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide users with a range of symbols and tools for self-expression. Users can use emojis, hashtags, and images to create and share messages with others. These symbols are used to convey specific meanings and can be interpreted in various ways by

different users. Symbolic interactionism can help researchers understand how people use social media to create and maintain relationships, express themselves, and negotiate social identities. For instance, users may use certain symbols or language to signal their affiliations, beliefs, or attitudes, and these signals can be interpreted by others to create shared meanings and social connections.

Another application of symbolic interactionism to current communication practices is in the study of **online communities**. Online communities are groups of individuals who come together around shared interests, goals, or identities. Symbolic interactionism can help researchers understand how these communities are formed, maintained, and negotiated through communication. In online communities, members use language, symbols, and gestures to establish shared meanings and social norms. These shared meanings and norms can help to create a sense of belonging and social identity within the community. Symbolic interactionism can provide insights into how these shared meanings and norms are created and how they change over time.

Evidently, symbolic interactionism can provide a useful framework for understanding current communication and media practices. By examining how individuals create and interpret meaning through communication, researchers can gain insights into how communication shapes social relationships, identities, and communities in the digital age.

g. *Other Application to Current Realities*

SI suggests that people create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the world around them (Serpe and Stryker, 2011), and that this meaning is constantly negotiated and renegotiated through ongoing social interactions.

There are numerous real-life situations in which the principles of Symbolic Interactionism can be applied. Here are a few examples:

1). **Dating and romantic relationships:** Symbolic Interactionism can help explain how individuals create and negotiate meanings in their romantic relationships. For example, how they interpret and respond to symbols like gifts, compliments, and physical touch can affect the development and maintenance of the relationship.

2). **Workplace dynamics:** Symbolic Interactionism can help us understand how employees develop their roles and identities within the workplace. For example, an employee may define themselves as a "team player" based on their interactions with

coworkers, or a manager may define their role based on their interactions with subordinates.

3). **Education:** Symbolic Interactionism can help us understand how students and teachers negotiate meaning in the classroom. For example, how teachers use language and symbols to create a classroom culture can impact students' learning experiences and academic performance.

4). **Cultural practices:** Symbolic Interactionism can help explain how people create and negotiate meanings in cultural practices like religious ceremonies and festivals. For example, how people interpret and respond to symbols like music, dress, and food can impact their participation and enjoyment of these cultural events.

5). **Family relationships:** Symbolic Interactionism can help us understand how family members develop their roles and identities through interactions with each other. For example, a child may learn to define themselves as the "responsible" one in the family based on the expectations and reactions of other family members.

6). **Social media:** With the rise of social media, Symbolic Interactionism can help us understand how individuals create and maintain their online identities through interactions with others. Users may define themselves as "influencers" or "content creators" based on the reactions and feedback of their followers. "Today, all social institutions are media institutions" (Altheide, 2003, p. 666 in Denzin, 2014, p.77).

Evidently, Symbolic Interactionism provides a valuable lens through which to view and understand the complex ways in which people interact with each other and with the world around them.

2. Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes the practical aspects of knowledge, truth, and inquiry (Maines, 2000). It originated in the United States in the late 19th century, with the work of Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. At its core, pragmatism is concerned with the usefulness of ideas and theories in solving practical problems. It holds that knowledge and truth are not fixed, absolute, or eternal, but rather are contingent on the practical consequences of believing them. In other words, what is true is what works or what is useful in a particular context (Allen, 2014).

Pragmatists assume that the meaning of a concept lies in its practical effects and that truth is determined by its practical consequences. This approach rejects absolute or fixed principles, focusing instead on the dynamic nature of beliefs and ideas. Scholars have engaged in debates surrounding pragmatism, offering both support and criticism. One notable supporter was William James (1842-1910), a key figure in the development of pragmatism, who argued for the importance of ideas in guiding action and shaping experience. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), another pragmatist, contributed by introducing the concept of "pragmatic maxim" and emphasizing the scientific method as a means of inquiry (Manyati, 2014).

However, critics like Bertrand Russell raised concerns about the relativism inherent in pragmatism, questioning the validity of truth determined solely by practical consequences. Russell argued for the existence of objective truths that are independent of their consequences (Cemikovaite and Mitkute, 2023).

In terms of communication and media practice, pragmatism has influenced the understanding of language and meaning. John Dewey (1859-1952), a prominent pragmatist, emphasized the role of communication in social interaction and the importance of language as a tool for problem-solving. Dewey's ideas contributed to the development of communication theories, highlighting the practical implications of communication processes in society.

While the pragmatist approach has faced criticism, its contributions to communication and media practice have been significant. Pragmatism's emphasis on the practical consequences of ideas has influenced the study of rhetoric, communication ethics, and media effects, providing a framework for understanding how communication shapes and is shaped by social reality.

a. Key concepts: truth, inquiry, and knowledge

One of the key concepts of pragmatism is **inquiry**, which involves a continuous process of experimentation, observation, and reflection. In this view, **knowledge** is not something that can be acquired once and for all, but rather is constantly evolving and subject to revision based on new experiences and insights (Carter and Fuller, 2016). Another important concept in pragmatism is the rejection of absolute or fixed **truth (**Axelrad, 2015). Pragmatists argue that truth is not something that can be discovered or attained

through pure reason or intuition. Instead, it is something that emerges from practical experience and experimentation.

b. Relation to other philosophical traditions, such as empiricism and existentialism

Pragmatism has been associated with other philosophical traditions, such as empiricism and existentialism. Like empiricism, pragmatism emphasizes the importance of empirical evidence and observation in the formation of knowledge (Czarniawska, 2003). Like existentialism, pragmatism emphasizes the individual's role in creating meaning and shaping their own reality. Evidently, pragmatism has been influential in many fields, including philosophy, education, psychology, and social and political theory, and continues to be an important perspective in contemporary philosophy.

c. Application to Current Communication & Media Practices

Pragmatism is a philosophical approach that emphasizes practical outcomes and consequences, rather than theoretical or abstract ideas (Chamberlain, Mills and Usher, 2013). In the context of communication and media practices, pragmatism can be applied in several ways:

1). **Focus on audience needs and preferences**: A pragmatic approach to communication and media practices involves a focus on the needs and preferences of the target audience. Instead of relying on abstract theories or assumptions about what the audience wants, a pragmatic approach seeks to gather feedback and data from the audience to inform content creation and dissemination.

2). **Emphasis on measurable outcomes:** A pragmatic approach to communication and media practices involves a focus on measurable outcomes. This means setting clear goals and objectives for communication and media efforts, and using data and analytics to measure progress towards those goals. By focusing on measurable outcomes, communication and media practitioners can make informed decisions about which strategies are most effective.

3). **Iterative approach to content creation:** A pragmatic approach to communication and media practices involves an iterative approach to content creation. This means creating content in small, testable increments and gathering feedback from the audience to refine and improve the content over time. By taking an iterative approach, communication and

media practitioners can create content that is more responsive to audience needs and preferences.

4). **Use of technology to enhance communication:** A pragmatic approach to communication and media practices involves a focus on using technology to enhance communication. This means exploring new technologies and tools that can improve the reach, engagement, and effectiveness of communication and media efforts. By leveraging technology, communication and media practitioners can create more impactful and innovative content.

5). Pragmatism highlights the importance of **ethics** and **social responsibility**. In the context of communication and media, this means that practitioners must be mindful of the potential impacts of their messages on society and the environment. They must strive to create messages that are truthful, accurate, and respectful of diverse perspectives and cultures, and they must be willing to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions.

6). Pragmatism also emphasizes the **importance of collaboration and cooperation**. In the context of communication and media, this means that practitioners must work closely with others in their field, as well as with other stakeholders such as community members, policymakers, and industry partners. By working together, they can share knowledge and resources, build consensus around key issues, and create more effective and sustainable communication and media practices.

7). One key aspect of pragmatism is its **focus on experimentation and adaptation**. In communication and media, this means that practitioners must continually test and refine their methods to ensure that they are achieving their desired goals. This can involve experimenting with different messaging strategies, using different platforms or channels to reach different audiences, and measuring the results of these efforts to see what is working and what is not.

Thus, the application of pragmatism to current communication and media practices involves a focus on audience needs and preferences, emphasis on measurable outcomes, iterative approach to content creation, and use of technology to enhance communication. By taking a pragmatic approach, communication and media practitioners can create content that is more effective, efficient, and responsive to the needs of their audience.

d. Other Application to Current Realities

Pragmatism is a theory that focuses on solving problems in real-life situations rather than speculating about the nature of reality.

Here are some examples of how pragmatism can be applied in real-life situations:

1). **Education:** In education, pragmatism emphasizes the importance of hands-on learning experiences and problem-solving skills over rote memorization of facts. Teachers who apply pragmatism in their classrooms focus on developing critical thinking skills in their students, encouraging them to apply what they have learned to real-world situations.

2). **Medicine:** In medicine, pragmatism is used to guide clinical decision-making. Doctors and other healthcare professionals use their experience and judgment to make decisions based on the best available evidence and the needs of their patients. They may use a trial-and-error approach to find the most effective treatment for a particular patient, rather than relying solely on established protocols.

3). **Politics:** Pragmatism is also relevant in politics, where it can be applied to finding practical solutions to complex problems. Rather than relying on ideology or abstract principles, politicians who embrace pragmatism seek to find solutions that work in the real world, taking into account the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

4). **Business:** In business, pragmatism can be applied to decision-making and problem-solving. Business leaders who embrace pragmatism focus on finding practical solutions to challenges, rather than relying on theoretical or abstract concepts. They may also prioritize innovation and experimentation, taking a trial-and-error approach to finding new solutions to problems.

5). **Science:** Pragmatism has been applied in science by emphasizing empirical evidence and experimentation over theory. This approach values practical results over abstract theories and encourages scientists to test their ideas in the real world.

Pragmatism can be applied in many different areas of life, helping individuals and organizations to focus on practical solutions to real-world problems. By emphasizing experience and practicality over theory and abstract principles, pragmatism encourages individuals to think creatively and innovatively to find solutions that work in the real world.

3. Social Constructionism

Social constructionism, as Zhao (2020) puts it, is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of social and cultural factors in shaping knowledge, reality, and power. It posits that people do not discover an objective reality but rather construct their understanding of the world through shared cultural frameworks, social institutions, and language (Charles, 2018; Gabatz, Schwartz and Milbrath, 2017). The origins of social constructionism can be traced back to the works of the French philosopher Michel Foucault and the American sociologist Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in the 1960s. Berger and Luckmann's book "The Social Construction of Reality" (1966) is considered a foundational text in the field (Springham, 2016).

Social constructionism assumes that individuals collectively create and maintain shared meanings, shaping their understanding of the world through language, symbols, and cultural norms. Social constructionism challenges the notion of an objective reality existing independently of human perception.

One key assumption of social constructionism is that knowledge and meaning are not inherent in the external world but are socially constructed through communication and interaction (Sheehy, 2011). This perspective emphasizes the role of language and discourse in shaping individuals' perceptions and experiences. Another assumption is that power dynamics play a crucial role in the construction of reality, with certain groups or institutions influencing and controlling the dominant narratives in society.

Proponents of social constructionism argue that this framework provides a valuable lens for understanding how individuals and societies create meaning and reality. It offers a way to explore the influence of language, culture, and social structures on our understanding of the world. By acknowledging the socially constructed nature of reality, social constructionism encourages a critical examination of dominant narratives and the recognition of multiple perspectives (Wong, 2006).

Critics of social constructionism argue that it may lead to relativism and a rejection of any objective reality. They contend that certain aspects of the world exist independently of human perception and are not solely products of social construction. Additionally, critics suggest that social constructionism might undermine the importance of empirical evidence and scientific inquiry in understanding the world (Zhao, 2020).

The emergence of social constructionism is often traced back to the latter half of the 20th century, with contributions from scholars like Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Gergen (1985). In the field of communication and media practice, social constructionism has influenced research on language, discourse analysis, and the study of media representations. Scholars have applied social constructionist principles to analyze how media constructs and shapes societal norms, values, and perceptions, highlighting the dynamic interplay between media messages and social reality (Triplett, 2016).

Social constructionism challenges traditional views of reality by asserting that it is a product of social interactions and interpretations (Anastasiou and Kauffman, 2011). While it has been influential in advancing our understanding of how meaning is constructed, it also faces criticism for potentially undermining the concept of objective reality. In the realm of communication and media practice, social constructionism has provided a valuable framework for analyzing the role of language and media in shaping our shared understanding of the world.

a. Key concepts: knowledge, reality, and power

One of the key concepts of social constructionism is that **knowledge** and **reality** are socially constructed. This means that what people consider as objective truth is actually the result of social processes and cultural practices. Knowledge is not an independent entity, but rather a product of social interaction. **Power** is another central concept in social constructionism. The theory posits that power is not just an attribute of individuals but a product of social relations. Power operates through discursive practices, which shape how people perceive themselves and their place in society (Carter and Alvarado, 2018).

b. How meaning and knowledge are socially constructed

Social constructionism suggests that meaning and knowledge are socially constructed through language and discourse. Language is not just a means of communication but also a social practice that shapes how people think and understand the world. Language and discourse create categories and concepts that people use to make sense of their experiences and create their understanding of the world.

c. Intersection with other theories, such as postmodernism and feminism

Social constructionism intersects with other theories, such as postmodernism and feminism, which share a critical stance towards the dominant culture and question the objectivity of knowledge and reality.

d. Criticisms and limitations of the theory

Critics of social constructionism argue that it leads to relativism, where any interpretation of reality is considered equally valid. They also point out that the theory lacks empirical evidence to support its claims. Additionally, some critics accuse social constructionism of neglecting the role of material conditions, such as economic factors, in shaping society.

e. Application to Current Communication & Media Practices

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that suggests that reality is not an objective, fixed entity but rather is constructed and negotiated through language, symbols, and social interactions (Garrison, 1995). It emphasizes the role of culture, language, and power in shaping our understanding of the world around us. When applied to current communication and media practices, social constructionism suggests that our perceptions and beliefs about the media are shaped by the social, cultural, and historical contexts in which they are produced and consumed. This means that media messages are not objective reflections of reality but are instead socially constructed and influenced by the cultural and ideological beliefs of the individuals and institutions producing them. Social constructionism suggests that certain groups have more power to shape and influence our perceptions of reality than others, and that this can lead to the marginalization or erasure of certain perspectives and experiences.

One way in which social constructionism is applied to current communication and media practices is through the analysis of **media representations**. Scholars using this perspective examine how media representations of social groups, events, and issues are constructed and how they reflect and reinforce cultural values, beliefs, and power relations. For example, they might analyze how news coverage of a political event portrays different political parties or how television shows represent gender, race, and sexuality. For example, social constructionism would argue that the way that different social groups are portrayed in the media can shape our understanding of their identity and place in society. This could include representations of gender, race, sexuality, and other social categories. By examining the

language and symbols used in media and communication, we can gain insights into the ways in which these constructions of identity are created and perpetuated.

Another way in which social constructionism is applied to media and communication practices is through the analysis of **media production and consumption**. Scholars using this perspective examine how media content is produced, distributed, and consumed and how these processes are shaped by social and cultural factors. They might analyze how media organizations create and distribute content, how audiences interpret and respond to media messages, and how the media industry is influenced by political and economic factors.

Evidently, the application of social constructionism to current communication and media practices provides a critical lens through which to examine the role of media in shaping our understanding of the world around us. It emphasizes the importance of considering the social and cultural context in which media messages are produced and consumed and highlights the need to critically analyze media representations and production practices in order to understand their impact on society.

f. *Application to current* realities

Here are some examples of how social constructionism can be applied to real-life situations:

I). **Gender roles:** Social constructionism suggests that gender roles are not biologically determined but are socially constructed. In other words, the way we think about gender is shaped by cultural and social factors. For example, men are expected to be strong and assertive, while women are expected to be nurturing and caring. By recognizing the social construction of gender roles, we can challenge traditional stereotypes and work towards more equitable and inclusive societies.

2). **Race and ethnicity:** Social constructionism also applies to race and ethnicity. Race is not a biologically determined characteristic, but rather a socially constructed category that is based on physical characteristics, ancestry, and cultural practices. By understanding the social construction of race, we can challenge racism and work towards a more inclusive and diverse society.

3). **Mental illness:** Social constructionism suggests that mental illness is not an objective category, but rather a socially constructed label that is influenced by

cultural and historical factors. By recognizing the social construction of mental illness, we can challenge stigmatization and work towards more compassionate and supportive approaches to mental health.

4). **Education:** Social constructionism can also be applied to education. The way we understand and value education is shaped by cultural and social factors (Ukasoanva, 2014). For example, in some cultures, education is highly valued and seen as a pathway to success, while in others, it may be viewed as less important. By recognizing the social construction of education, we can work towards more equitable and inclusive educational systems.

In furtherance, social constructionism can be a useful theoretical perspective for understanding how social and cultural factors shape our understanding of reality. By recognizing the social construction of various aspects of our lives, we can challenge traditional stereotypes, stigmatization, and inequality, and work towards more inclusive and equitable societies.

METHODS

This study adopts a conceptual research method on symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, and social constructionism and focuses on a thorough examination of scholarly literature and theoretical frameworks related to these theoretical perspectives. The research involved an extensive review of academic journals, books, and articles to identify key concepts, principles, and debates within symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, and social constructionism. Additionally, a systematic analysis of their impact on communication and media practice was conducted, exploring how these theoretical lenses shape the understanding of communication processes and media phenomena. The paper employed a qualitative approach, emphasizing the interpretation and synthesis of existing knowledge to develop a comprehensive understanding of the theoretical foundations and practical implications of these perspectives in the context of communication and media.

RESULTS

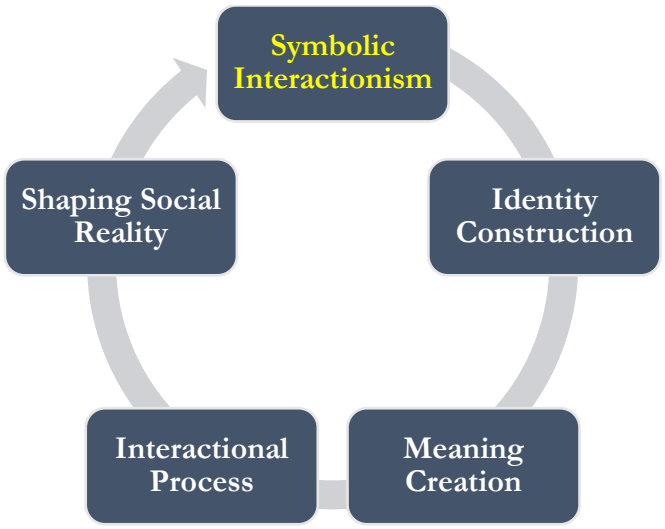

Figure 1: Major contributions of Symbolic Interactionism (SI) to media practice.

Symbolic Interactionism Findings:

a. Individuals construct meaning through the exchange of symbols in communication and media practices.

b. Decoding symbols and understanding varied interpretations are crucial aspects of media engagement.

c. Media representations play a significant role in the construction and negotiation of individual identities.

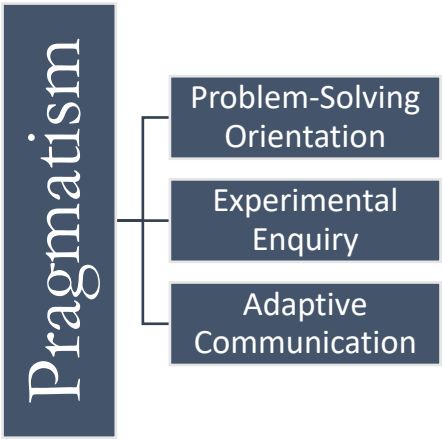

Figure 2: Pragmatism's contribution to communication and media practice

s

Pragmatism Findings:

a. A problem-solving orientation is essential in addressing communication issues, emphasizing adaptability and flexibility.

b. Empirical inquiry and experimentation are encouraged in media practices to determine effective communication strategies.

c. Adaptive communication, reflecting a commitment to achieving desired outcomes, is a key aspect of communication practices.

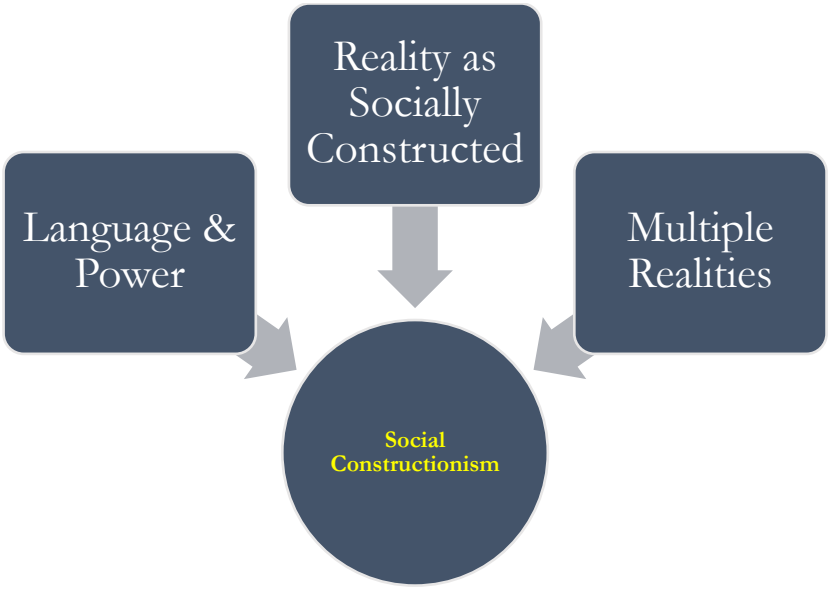

Figure 3: Social Constructionism's contribution to communication & media practice

Social Constructionism Findings:

a. Reality is socially constructed through language, communication, and shared meaning in the digital age.

b. Media plays a role in constructing and influencing societal narratives, prompting critical examination.

c. Power dynamics in language and discourse impact media representations, reinforcing or challenging existing structures.

DISCUSSION

The theoretical frameworks of Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism provide valuable lenses through which to analyze and understand communication and media practices. Symbolic Interactionism emphasizes the role of symbols and language in shaping social reality, emphasizing the continuous process of interpretation and meaning creation (Kunchamboo and Little, 2022). In the context of communication and media practices, this perspective sheds light on how individuals assign meanings to symbols, decode media messages, and negotiate identities influenced by media representations.

Pragmatism, on the other hand, focuses on the practical consequences of actions, promoting adaptability and a problem-solving orientation. In communication and media practices, Pragmatism encourages an empirical and experimental inquiry, advocating for flexible approaches that adapt to specific contexts. This perspective also highlights the importance of adaptive communication, where individuals and organizations adjust their practices based on feedback to achieve desired outcomes.

Social Constructionism posits that reality is socially constructed through language, communication, and shared meaning (Knoblauch, 2013). This perspective challenges the notion of an objective reality, emphasizing the socially negotiated nature of meaning. In communication and media practices, Social Constructionism prompts critical examination of how media constructs and influences societal narratives, highlighting language and discourse's power dynamics. Additionally, it encourages a more inclusive approach that acknowledges diverse voices and perspectives in media content creation and dissemination.

Scholars often integrate elements from these theories to provide a more comprehensive understanding of communication and media practices. The synergies between these perspectives lie in their shared emphasis on the dynamic nature of communication, the importance of interpretation and meaning-making, and the need for adaptability. However, tensions may arise when considering the different ontological and epistemological foundations of these theories.

When these theoretical perspectives intersect, they collectively shape the dynamics of communication in the digital age. The digital landscape introduces new challenges and opportunities, with symbols, language, and discourse evolving in the online space. The continuous interactional process highlighted by Symbolic Interactionism is intensified in

digital communication, where individuals engage with media content in real-time and contribute to the construction of meaning collectively. Pragmatic approaches are crucial in navigating the rapidly changing digital environment, where adaptive communication and experimental strategies are essential.

Social Constructionism's emphasis on multiple realities and perspectives becomes particularly relevant in the digital age, where diverse voices and narratives can proliferate. However, tensions may arise concerning the power dynamics inherent in online discourse, as certain voices may dominate or be marginalized. Navigating these tensions requires a deep understanding of how symbolic interaction, pragmatism, and social construction collectively influence and shape digital communication practices. In essence, these theoretical perspectives provide a rich framework for exploring and comprehending the intricate dynamics of communication in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical perspectives of Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism have significantly shaped and influenced communication and media practices. Symbolic Interactionism emphasizes the importance of symbols and shared meanings in human interaction, providing a lens through which to understand how individuals create and interpret messages in various media contexts. Pragmatism, with its focus on practicality and problem-solving, has contributed to the development of communication strategies that are effective and adaptable to real-world situations.

Social Constructionism, on the other hand, underscores the role of language and societal norms in shaping our perceptions of reality. This perspective challenges traditional notions of objectivity in media, highlighting the subjective nature of reality and encouraging a critical examination of the power dynamics embedded in communication processes. Together, these theoretical frameworks have paved the way for a more nuanced and contextual understanding of communication and media, acknowledging the dynamic interplay between individuals, society, and the constructed nature of meaning.

As communication and media practices continue to evolve in the ever-changing landscape of technology and globalization, these theoretical perspectives remain valuable tools for scholars, practitioners, and media professionals alike. By embracing the insights offered by Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism, we can

navigate the complexities of communication in a more informed and socially conscious manner, fostering meaningful interactions and contributing to a more inclusive and reflective media landscape.

Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to **Professor Ashong C. Ashong** of the Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo for his invaluable contributions in laying the foundation for this research paper. His profound insights, guidance, and unwavering support have played a pivotal role in shaping the exploration of Symbolic Interactionism, Pragmatism, and Social Constructionism and their impact on communication and media practice. Professor Ashong's expertise, mentorship, and scholarly wisdom have been instrumental in refining the theoretical framework and methodology of this study. His dedication to fostering academic excellence and intellectual curiosity has greatly enriched our understanding of these theoretical perspectives. We are truly fortunate to have had the privilege of learning from such a distinguished scholar and we are deeply appreciative of his enduring influence on the development of this research.

REFERENCES

Allen, M. (2014). Narrative diversity and sympathetic abortion: What online storytelling reveals about the prescribed norms of the mainstream movements. Symbolic Interaction, 38(1), 42–63.

Anastasiou, D., & Kauffman, J. M. (2011). A Social Constructionist Approach to Disability: Implications for Special Education. Exceptional Children, 10.1177/001440291107700307, 77(3), 367-384.

Austin, C. G., & Huang, L. (2015). Gift or gift card? Symbolic interactionism in gift exchange. In M. C. Dato-on (Ed.), The Sustainable Global Marketplace (p. 19). New York: Springer.

Axelrad, S. (2015). Field theory in social science: selected theoretical papers by Kurt Lewin. International Journal of Group Psychotherapy, 1(4), 388–389.

Azarian, R. (2021). Analytical sociology and symbolic interactionism: bridging the intra-disciplinary divide. The American Sociologist, 52(3), 1–18.

Blumer, H. (1962). Society as symbolic interaction. In A. M. Rose (Ed.), Human Behavior and Social Processes (pp. 179–192). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Blumer, H. (1969). Symbolic interactionism. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Blumer, H. (1969). Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Blumer, H. (1981). George Herbert Mead. In B. Rhea (Ed.), The future of the sociological classics (pp. 136–169). London: Allen & Unwin.

Braun, S. (2014). Can we all agree? Building the case for symbolic interactionism as the theoretical origins of public relations. Journal of Professional Communication, 4(1), 49–70.

Carlson, E. (2012). Precepting and symbolic interactionism – a theoretical look at preceptorship during clinical practice. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 10.1111/j.1365-2648.2012.06047.x, 69(2), 457-464.

Carter, M. J., & Alvarado, A. M. (2017). Symbolic Interactionism as a Methodological Framework. In Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences (pp. 1-19). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2779-6_62-1

Carter, M. J., & Alvarado, A. M. (2018). Symbolic interactionism as a methodological framework. In P. Liamputtong (Ed.), Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences (pp. 1–19). Springer.

Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015). Symbolic interactionism. Sociopedia.isa. https://doi.org/10.1177/205684

Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2016). Symbols, meaning, and action: The past, present, and future of symbolic interactionism. Current Sociology, 64(6), 931–961. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392116638396

Casino, V. J., & Thien, D. (2020). Symbolic Interactionism. In International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (Second Edition) (pp. 177–181). California: SAGE Publications.

Černikovaitė, M. E., & Mitkutė, M. (2023). Expression of Identity in Tattoos of Symbols of Different Cultures. Information & Media, 10.15388/Im.2023.95.65, 96, 53-69.

Chamberlain-Salaun, J., Mills, J., & Usher, K. (2013). Linking Symbolic Interactionism and Grounded Theory Methods in a Research Design: From Corbin and Strauss' Assumptions to Action. SAGE Open, 3(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013505757

Charles, Q. (2018). Symbolic Interactionism: The Basics. Vernon Press.

Czarniawska, B. (2003). Social Constructionism and Organization Studies. In R. Westwood & S. R. Clegg (Eds.), Debating Organization: Point–Counterpoint in Organization Studies (pp. 128–139). Blackwell.

Denzin, N. K. (2014). Symbolic interactionism and the Media. The Handbook of Media and Mass Communication Theory (pp. 74–94). John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Gabatz, R., Schwartz, E., & Milbrath, V. M. (2017). Attachment theory, symbolic interactionism and grounded theory: articulating reference frameworks for research. Texto contexto – enferm, 26, 1–8.

Garrison, J. (1995). Deweyan pragmatism and the epistemology of contemporary social constructivism. American Educational Research Journal, 32(4), 716-740.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Lee, C. M. (2002). Cross-Cultural Communication Theories. In W. B. Gudykunst & B. Mody (Eds.), Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication (pp. 25–50). Sage.

Handberg, C., Thorne, S., Midtgaard, J., Nielsen, C. V., & Lomborg, K. (2014). Revisiting Symbolic Interactionism as a Theoretical Framework Beyond the Grounded Theory Tradition. Qualitative Health Research, 10.1177/1049732314554231, 25(8), 1023-1032.

Houser, N. (2010). The church of pragmatism. Semiotica, 178, 105–114. https://doi.org/10.1515/semi.2010.007.

Knoblauch, H. (2013). Communicative constructivism and mediatization. Communication Theory, 23(3), 297-315.

Kunchamboo, V., & Little, V. (2022). Four ecotourism archetypes: expressing symbolic desires. Journal of Ecotourism, 10.1080/14724049.2022.2077355, 22(4), 502-517.

Low, J., & Thomson, L. (2021). Symbolic interactionism and the myth of a structural bias: a textual defense and illustrative advice. Canadian Journal of Sociology, 46(2), 97–119.

Maines, D. R. (2000). Pragmatism. In E. F. Borgatta & R. J. V. Montgomery (Eds.), Encyclopedia of Sociology (pp. 2217–2224). Macmillan.

Manyati, T. (2014). Innovation through knowledge sharing: Evidence from the informal sector in Harare, Zimbabwe. African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development, 10.1080/20421338.2014.947196, 6(4), 281-288.

Num, K. S. F., Aizuddin, A. N., Tong, S. F., Said, M. S. M. (2023). A grounded theory research protocol on an attempt to practice interprofessional collaborative care by a primary care clinic health professional fresh graduate in diabetes care. Frontiers in Medicine, 10.3389/fmed.2023.1133948, 10.

Remmling, G. W. (2020). Towards the Sociology of Knowledge (RLE Social Theory): Origin and Development of a Sociological Thought Style. Taylor & Francis.

Salvini, A. (2010). Symbolic interactionism and social network analysis: An uncertain encounter. Symbolic Interaction, 33(3), 364–388.

Serpe, R. T., & Stryker, S. (2011). The symbolic interactionist perspective and identity theory. In S. Schwartz, K. Luyckx, & V. Vignoles (Eds.), Handbook of Identity Theory and Research (pp. 225–248). London: Springer.

Sheehy, M. (2011). Illuminating constructivism: Structure, discourse, and subjectivity in a middle school classroom. Reading Research Quarterly, 10.1598/RRQ.37.3.2, 37(3), 278-308.

Springham, N. (2016). Description as social construction in UK art therapy research. International Journal of Art Therapy, 10.1080/17454832.2016.1220399, 21(3), 104-115.

Stryker, S., & Vryan, K. D. (2006). The Symbolic Interactionist Frame. In J. Delamater (Ed.), Handbook of Social Psychology. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36921-X_1

Triplett, C. F. (2016). The Social Construction of "Struggle": Influences of School Literacy Contexts, Curriculum, and Relationships. Journal of Literacy Research, 10.1080/10862960709336759, 39(1), 95-126.

Ukasoanya, G. (2014). Social adaptation of new immigrant students: Cultural scripts, roles, and symbolic interactionism. International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 36(2), 150–161.

Wang, L. (2023). A Study of Symbolic Interactionism and Communication from the Perspective of American Social Psychology. European Review, 31(3), 213–226. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1062798722000266

Wong, Y. J. (2006). Strength-Centered Therapy: A social constructionist, virtues-based psychotherapy. Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 10.1037/0033-3204.43.2.133, 43(2), 133-146.

Zhao, H. (2020). Explicating the social constructionist perspective on crisis communication and crisis management research: a review of communication and business journals. Journal of Public Relations Research, 10.1080/1062726X.2020.1802732, 32(3-4), 98-119.