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Intro to CCT

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Inception

The movie Inception illustrates the power of an implanted ideas that forces a son to tear down his father's business empire like the quote from the movie transcript "A simple idea that will change everything." (Nolan) In reality, there is no dream machine for inception. Still, influencer marketing, viral marketing, word of mouth marketing, and other marketing strategies can promote products, develop customer loyalty, and improve sales. Plus, introducing influencers, Two-Step-Flows, and Social Analysis Network are great tools for mass media. However, there are also controversies questioning the power of influences of those marketing and media strategies. This essay will identify the forms of inception approach in the market and media and the criticizes. The article will then focus on viral and influencer marketing, and for media, the essay will engage with the connection between mass media and audiences.

Merriam-Webster defines inception as "an act, process, or instance of beginning." (Dictionary). The definition is different from the meaning expressed in the movie Inception, to insert an idea into someone's mind. However, it helps to explain why Nolan named the movie Inception. In the movie, Cobb plants the concept without a trace. In order to do so, the team must find the source of an idea to embeds another idea. (Nolan) Similarly, in reality, environment and learning proved to have a substantial impact on people's characteristics, behavior, thoughts, and ideas, especially in the beginning process of forming an opinion. In John B. Watson's book Behaviorism (1959), Watson raised an argument against the theory of Eugenics. He believed the

environment and learning are more important than genes when developing people's knowledge, behavior, and personality. He also used an extreme example to support this theory that if give him dozens of children, he could build their career based on his decision. (Watson, 1959)

However, unlike learning from the beginning as a child, the inception happened when one fully knows and is still influenced by other factors. For example, even knowing the smoking outcomes, people will still smoke for different reasons like peer pressure or persuaded by the movies with smoking scenes. Therefore, inception is more like telling an adult man to change his opinion or add an idea to his original thought. And the question is how marketing and media strategies accomplish the inception.

In 1950, Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz noticed that there was limited evidence showing that mass media can efficiently penetrate and deliver information to audiences. Thus, they pointed out the Limited Effects Theory that mass media could not directly change viewers' strongly-held opinions because they chose to accept the message from mass media based on their interpretations. (Oxford Reference) Therefore, Lazarsfeld and Katz raised another theory explaining the influence of the media's power, the Two-Step-Flows idea. The thesis involves mass media, opinion leaders, and the public. According to the theory, mass media's messages must pass through active users, which are opinion leaders, then arrive at less active users, which are the public, in order to have better penetration and influence power. (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955)

They also used an observation during the 1940 governor election to prove the theory. They discovered most voters got to know the candidates from others who received candidates' information from newspapers instead of reading the newspaper. (Monica, 2016)

After raising the Two-Step-Flow theory, Lazarsfeld soon put on a large-scale research program called Annie Project. During the research, Lazarsfeld created the Stanton-Lazarsfeld Program Analyzers device to measure audiences' attitude and feelings when receiving radio information. Different groups of test subjects would express their positive or negative impression of the radio, and the outcome would use to analyze the influential power of media in society. The result proved the importance of the existence of an intermediary between mass media and audiences. (Mitchell, 2015) However, as Theodor Adorno (2005), the program leader mentioned, the research methodology was too simplistic because the dependent variable was just positive or negative feelings so that other valuable feelings were filtered and ignored. (Müller-Doohm & Livingstone, 2005)

Marshall McLuhan (2019) raised another argument against the theory of Two-Step-Flow. Because Lazarsfeld developed the Two-Step-Flow theory using Limited Effect Theory as premises, he assumes that the audiences' feelings and opinions are the main factors of media's influence power. Marshall questioned this assumption with another interpretation of the media's influence power. "Sense Expectation Theory posits that media effects are culturally induced and are medium-specific." (Yusuf, 2019) Marshall suggested that besides the penetration power, the media played other roles to reinforce its influential power. For example, a community newspaper, it reports local news that is narrower than a national newspaper. However, readers will still read to reinforce the community bond and develop shared culture in the community.

Despite the arguments against the theories, the theory will still significantly impact people's everyday lives. In the movie Inception, they are called dream constructors, and in real

life, they are called opinion leaders and influencers. Newspapers, radios, Television programs, social media, and other media forms will act as the middle part of the Two-Step-Flow. From the book *Follow the Leader: Opinion Polls and the Modern Presidents*, Brace and Hinckley stated that people were concerned about the presidents' increasing strength on public-opinion polls, and media was an essential determinant. And they explained one of the main reasons was that the media could subtly affect the public's understanding of poll data. (Brace & Hinckley, 1992) For example, quoted from the book, "Media used to announce the winners of presidential debates before viewers could form their own impressions." Plus, they also concluded thThe popular rating-the-presidents game, engaged in by journalists and the public, is played out in a widening vacuum of knowledge" (Brace & Hinckley, 1992).

However, there are other interpretations of the result of opinion leadership. Despite the opinion-leading power owned by the influencers, some of the voters already decided who to vote. Voters may choose the media that has a similar political perspective. In 1960, Peter Watson first named this kind of bias the Confirmation Bias that people will believe in their original thought and try to support their opinion (Iqra, 2020). Thus, voters may have already made up their minds before choosing the opinion leader.

Two-Step-Flow was also implied in influencer marketing and experienced great success. Paul Lazarsfeld and R. Merton (1948) once mentioned the involvement of business in media on social influences in their book *Mass Communication Popular Taste and Organized Social Action*. The book stated that companies would finance the production and distribution of mass media for their purposes, like paying "pipers" for a particular "tune" (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1948). Then,

the business realized the importance of implanted advertisements. And with the development of the internet, influencer marketing became an irreplaceable marketing strategy. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media are the primary platforms for influencer marketing. And according to Duncan Brown's (2008) *Influencer Marketing*, one of the critical points of a successful influencer strategy is that the real information needs to embed under the other information that is easier to digest for customers. (Brown & Hayes, 2008) There will be more co-operation between companies and social media influencers to host advertisement campaigns. For example, Subaru's sales increased by 10% by 2016, contributing to their most successful influencer marketing campaign with 20 influencers, including Zach King. The influencers can choose their topic but related to the Subaru brand. For instance, Zach successfully impressed his date with his Subaru car in his Instagram video and got over 8 million views (Influencermarketinghub, 2020).

Influencers can receive a considerable benefit for the company and themselves, but the question is, what takes to be an opinion leader or an influencer? French and Raven's (1976) Bases of Power theory illustrate the powers to govern, lead, or influence a group, community, or country, from the book, *Social psychology: people in groups*. Authors categorized them into six forms of powers: coercive, reward, legitimate, referent, expert, and informative powers. (Raven & Rubin, 1976) Most of these influencers are qualified with those powers. For example, expert power, people often subscribe to influencers' channels for their expertise in specific fields, such as technology or fashion. Reward power, because of co-operation with companies, influencers usually can provide discounts or coupons on a product. The book also discussed the formation of different opinion leadership with varying combinations of power use. (Raven & Rubin, 1976)

The relationship between the group of users and influencers is mutual that influencers can pass the messages, but users also can choose their influencers. John Scott (2013) suggested this idea in his book, "What is social network analysis?" Quoted from his book, "a group can enhance or undermine power to construct a particular structure of influencer." (Scott, 2013)

The power structure theory was highly popular in studying leadership power. However, some scholars pointed out that there were insufficient empirical studies to support the idea. In 1985, Philip and Chester reanalyzed the theory by putting it into several case studies. By comparing the outcomes of case studies to the view, the authors found that case studies could not draw a clear conclusion to support the idea, especially for the respect and the referent power. Therefore, they encouraged scholars to conduct more research, and they also gave suggestions and introductions for future experiments. (Podsakoff & Schriesheim, 1985)

In a social network, influencers are like the central stars that connect other users, and the message can spread to the whole system with the help of companies or media behind. This type of analysis was widely used by businesses to determine the influencers, discover potential customers, and create viral marketing. In John Scott's (2013) book What is social network analysis, Arthur introduced the precursor of social science, Jacob L. Moreno. also known as the "leading influence in the development of the SNA." Since he was the first to construct the formal method for making the social relationship chart (Scott, 2013). In the book "Who Shall Survive?" written by Moreno (1953), he constructed the first graphical social network of a New York training school for girls and used the modal to explain the school's pandemic. (Moreno, 1953)

One of the applications of SNA in marketing strategy is viral marketing. This type of marketing has fewer requirements for influencers to lead the opinion. Instead, viral marketing allows users to pass the idea in their network, such as word-of-mouth advertising. Ralph F Wilson (2018) offered six primary advice for a successful viral marketing campaign, and some of them illustrate the idea of inception well. (Wilson, 2018) He also provided a classic marketing campaign. At the beginning of the email era, Hotmail attached a message on people's emails that signing up is free. And months later, there was a massive increase in Hotmail users. Wilson concluded that successful viral marketing requires a buzz point, like free products or services, that can easily transmit in the group (Wilson, 2018).

The movie Inception was recent but most of the giants pointed out their theories decades ago. Those theories came from many subjects including philosophy, social science, communication and marketing. After years of development, many scholars reanalysis the and improve the theories. But still, there will be more to discover for the keyword inception.

Reference

Brace, P., & Hinckley, B. (1992). Follow the leader : opinion polls and the modern presidents .

BasicBooks.

Authors hold several case studies for US government elections to study the influence of the media in public opinions.

Brown, D., & Hayes, N. (2008). Influencer marketing : who really influences your customers? .

Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.

Business book for introducing influencer marketing. The book provided the development of influencer marketing as well as how to conduct an influencer marketing

Hovland, C., & Stouffer, S. (1953). Studies in social psychology in World War II ... [Princeton University Press].

Controversy to Paul Lazarsfeld's the Limited Effects theory, the study provides another explanation for the influential power of mass media. Plus, it gives an example of the extreme situation in the media as in war.

Influencermarketinghub. (2020, March 27). Retrieved from

<https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-case-studies/#:~:text=%20%20Influencer%20Marketing%20Case%20Studies%20with%20Incredible,an%20Australian%20fresh%20meal%20company%20that...%20More%20>

Eight examples of influencer marketing

Iqra, N. (2020, June 10). Retrieved from

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/confirmation-bias.html>

Author introduces the confirmation bias as well as giving out examples for the bias

Jerabek, H. (2001). Paul Lazarsfeld--The Founder of Modern Empirical Sociology: A Research Biography. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 13(3), 229–244.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/13.3.229>

Information for Paul Lazarsfeld and his two-step-flow with implication of current use in current research like social media.

Katz, E., & Lazarsfeld, P. (1955). *Personal influence; the part played by people in the flow of mass communications*. Free Press.

Arthur states the public has limited trust with mass media and raised the hypothesis that opinion leaders are required. This argument can help us discover the formation of influencers

Lazarsfeld, P., & Merton, R. (1948). *Mass communication popular taste and organized social action*.

The book discussed the relationship between mass communication and public tastes, and the function of company in the flow of information passing.

Merriam-Webster. Retrieved from

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/inception#synonym-discussion>

Definition of the word inception. Used to trace the original meaning.

Mitchell, G. (2015). Public Opinion, Thinly Sliced, and Served Hot. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 21–45.

The article shows the public opinions towards the Annies Program. From the opinions, the pros and cons of two-step-flow can be indicated

Moreno, J. (1953). *Who shall survive? Foundations of sociometry, group psychotherapy and sociodrama*. ([Rev. ed]). Beacon House.

In this book, Jacob first used graphic social network chart to interpret problem, and after years of evolution, methods are changed but concept described in the book remains

Monica, P. (2016, November 28). Retrieved from

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/two-step-flow-model-of-communication>

Monica introduced how Two-Step-Flow implied on the model and give the example on people's reaction in election voting

Müller-Doohm, S., & Livingstone, R. (2005). *Adorno : a biography* . Polity Press.
Adorno's biography. The book records the opinion of Adorno toward Annie's program and states the reason for him quitting the program.

Nolan, C. (Producer), & Nolan, C. (Director). (2010). Inception [Motion picture]. United States: Warner Bros.

Introduction uses the movie quote to illustrate the idea of inception, as well as the reason for choosing it as a keyword.

Oxfordreference. Retrieved from

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100106197>

The definition of Limited Effect theory that defined in Oxfordreference website

Podsakoff, P., & Schriesheim, C. (1985). Field Studies of French and Raven's Bases of Power:

Critique, Reanalysis, and Suggestions for Future Research. *Psychological Bulletin*, 97(3), 387–411. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.97.3.387>

The reanalysis for French and Raven's Bases of Power, giving the valuable suggestions for future related researches.

Raven, B., & Rubin, J. (1976). *Social psychology: people in groups*. Wiley.

5 types of power of influencers was illustrated in the book, by comparing with recent influencers, we can know which power was enhanced and which is undermined as forming a certain group.

Scott, J. (2013). *What is social network analysis?* . Bloomsbury Academic.

The book gives a good introduction to social network analysis, including history, method and case studies, so it is a good starting point for research. Plus, the book is newer than other cited books so it gives better critical information based on recent year situations.

Watson, J. (1959). Behaviorism ([Rev. ed). University of Chicago Press.

One of the most famous books written by Watson. Authur raised the “twelve infants” example , and this essay uses the theory to differentiate the difference between learning and inception.

Wilson, R. (2018, May 5). Retrieved from <https://www.practicalecommerce.com/viral-principles>

Wilson points out six factors in viral marketing and gives Hotmail marketing campaign as the example of viral marketing.

Yusuf, U. (2019, February 22). Retrieved from

<https://www.communicationtheory.org/limited-effects-theory/>

Yusuf briefly introduced the process of how Limited Effect theory became the premise of the Two-Step-Flow theory