



TEN (10) SCHOLARLY DEFINITIONS OF THEORY WITH RELEVANT CITATIONS

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Introduction

Theories and Models are concepts without a universal definition or meaning, rather scholars, experts and researchers have tried to define and explain theory based on their perception, background among others. No doubt, theory is one of the essential ingredients in explaining communication matters/events.

Thus, understanding theory helps in a great numbers of ways to under communication, research and many other human behaviours because theory depends on research to provide proof of the theories correctness. Anaeto, Onabajo and Osifeso (2008) when stating the importance of

theory, opined that, theory is what gives studies a required footing. Also, going by the position of Earl Barbie (1987) cited in Anaeto, et. al. (2008) stresses the three elements of social science research as theory, research and statistics. These constructs are based on the fact that theory generates research and research generates and refines theory.

Although, there are differing opinions as to what constitute a theory, a comparison and contrast of the diversity of opinions on what constitute the virtues of a good theory is important. Daniel (2012) in Wacker (1998) stated, “Operationalization of the definition of theory should directly be tied to the necessary components of theory”.

According to him, theory is composed of four components:

- (a) definitions,
- (b) a domain of applicability,
- (c) a set of relationships of variables, and
- (d) specific predictions or factual claims.

It is against the above assertion that some definitions of theory are examined in order to understand what theory meant to each of the scholars.

Definitions of Theory: An Overview

Dennis McQuail (1983) writes that a theory consists of a set of ideas of varying status and origin which seek to explain or interpret some phenomenon.

Kurt Lewin (1958), a theory is a way of explaining the ordering and recurrence of various events in the ecosphere.

Wilbur Schramm (1963) describes theory as a “crap-detector” which enables us to separate scientific statements from unscientific ones.

Earl Babbie (1989) says a theory is a generalized and more or less comprehensive set of statements relating different aspects of some phenomenon.

Severin and Tankard (1982) define theory as a set of ideas of systematic generalizations based on scientific observation (and) leading to further empirical observation.

Daramola (2003) writes that theory is a set of ideas which provides an explanation for communication phenomena while Abrah and Kaplan (1964) see theory as a way of making sense out of a disturbing situation.

Rychlak (1968) also held similar views and provided a description of theory as a series of two or more interrelated constructs, abstractions, concepts, variables, definition, and propositions, which have been hypothesized with a systematic view of phenomena, for the purpose of explaining and predicting the phenomena.

Theory is an ordered set of assertions about a generic behaviour or structure assumed to hold throughout a significantly broad range of specific instances (Sutherland, 1976).

A theory may be viewed as a system of constructs and variables in which the constructs are related to each other by propositions and the variables are related to each other by hypotheses (Bacharach, 1989).

Of all definitions, it appears that Kerlinger (1973) definition of theory is comprehensive when he defines theory as a set of inter-related constructs, definitions, and propositions that give a systematic view about phenomenon by specifying relations among variables with the purpose of explaining and predicting such phenomenon.

Conclusion

Having carefully examined some scholarly definitions and approach to theory, it is safe to conclude that theory is a tool used to explain, analysis, interpret and evaluate communication phenomenon in order to have full understanding on why people behave in certain way to communication, how communication medium also influence individual or group behaviour, why and how people use certain communication channel and not the other.

Equally, theories are about how and why events occur, how it happens and why. In short theory, as far as the field of communication is concerns, theory reveals certain basic and fundamental properties that explains the ebb and flow of events in specific process.

References

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