The *International Communication Association* (ICA) is an academic association for scholars interested in the study, teaching, and application of all aspects of human and mediated communication. ICA began more than 50 years ago as a small association of US researchers and is now a truly international association, with more than 4,500 members in 80 countries. Since 2003, ICA has been officially associated with the United Nations as a non-governmental association. The ICA has partnered with Wiley Blackwell to publish the 12-volume *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (Donsbach 2008, www.communicationencyclopedia.com).
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributors</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>xxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon</td>
<td>xxiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication A–Z</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index</td>
<td>660</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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This *Concise Encyclopedia of Communication* presents an authoritative and up-to-date account of the evidence in the dynamic and interdisciplinary field of communication, written by the best scholars in the field and developed from the highly praised twelve-volume *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, first published in 2008.

**Wikipedia or Communipedia? The Value of Authority**

Even in academic circles one can often hear the argument that the time of encyclopedias is over. Wikipedia and the search results of Google or Yahoo have it all anyway – and they draw from different sources, thus operating in a more pluralistic way. Indeed, Wikipedia and search engines are exciting steps forward in the documentation and sometimes even the creation of our knowledge about the world. One can look up almost everything on the Internet, and many scholars, including myself, use these tools many times a day, e.g. for learning the meaning of a foreign term, the lifecourse of an important figure, or even the basic content of an unfamiliar theory. On the web things look pretty much alike, often fancy, and presumably 'authoritative'. There is no visual and haptic authority against which they can be judged as there was in the pre-digital world. The print version of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, now itself history, did convey such an aura of the ultimate and best knowledge about everything. But with websites it is often difficult to distinguish the pros from the amateurs, the experts from the activists, or the neutral sources from PR.

This often difficult distinction of sources according to their credibility is of particular relevance when it comes to scientific work. Students who write a thesis on a subject, scholars who want to explore the evidence in a field that is not their own specialty, or the general public looking for practical advice: they all need ascertained evidence, evidence that is the best possible in the respective field, evidence that is not biased by a lack of competence, ideology, or economic interests. In short, they need the evidence that the most knowledgeable people in this area can come up with.

From a systemic point of view it is the core function of science to supply to society this best possible, ‘approved’ knowledge about an area; in the words of the late German sociologist Niklas Luhmann to apply the code “true/false” to assertions about reality. These assessments enable other subsystems of society to make rational decisions. Looked at from the individual’s point of view, scientific knowledge feeds our psychological...
control motivation: we want to understand things, explain what has happened and – even more important in practical life – know what will happen when we do certain things, make decisions, be it investments or allowing our children to use certain media. Scientific evidence can supply this knowledge, and this is why social systems have always supported professions who supply this knowledge – in earlier times based on narratives that shamans and priests provided, since the Enlightenment predominantly based on systematic evidence as proposed by great scholars like Francis Bacon in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and Auguste Comte in the nineteenth.

Of course, it may happen that what is "true" today can be "wrong" tomorrow. And on many topics there is no such approved, unanimously agreed-upon, evidence but only a provisional consensus, and sometimes not even that, but only a body of hotly debated evidence. But even the documentation of doubts and controversies represents scientific evidence. When scholars agree to disagree, be it on the role of man in climate change or on the effects of violent computer games – as they do in both cases – then at least we can say what we can about the phenomena to the best of our knowledge as of today. Knowledge needs the authority of the best experts in order to give orientation. And this is why an encyclopedia in an academic field like communication still makes sense. We sometimes call the different publications in this overall ICA/Wiley Blackwell project our “Communipedia” – rich and searchable like Wikipedia but with the authority of the scientific community in communication.

The Interplay of People and Organizations

To live up to this standard requires people and organizations. Let me start with the organizations: this encyclopedia is an ICA product. The International Communication Association, with its now almost 4,500 members from some 80 countries, constitutes the backbone of our scientific community. At its conferences and in its publications (many of the flagship journals in the field are ICA journals) it assembles the most up-to-date and relevant communication research worldwide. When we were working towards the completion of the twelve-volume IEC I started with the ICA divisions, used the expertise and the overview of the division heads to decide about the selection of headwords and of authors. Thus, the authority of ICA as our major scientific organization is transferred to and validates all our different encyclopedias – 2015 will see the start of our new series of about 15 multi-volume sub-disciplinary encyclopedias of communication – and, we hope, these publications will contribute to the authority of ICA.

As some people believe that we don’t need reference works any more (see above) there are also some who think the business of academic publishing has had its day. Having worked now for more than ten years closely with Blackwell (since 2007 part of Wiley Blackwell) I have a clear view on the central functions that publishing companies fulfill even in a digitalized world. Only the professionals at a commercial but academically committed company such as Wiley Blackwell have an expert view of the market and thus of what is needed in a particular field, supply and control the necessary procedures for bringing a publication from idea to print (online and offline), and have the know-how and the resources for marketing, especially when it comes to international markets. This business competence is, though, worthless without a commitment to research and to the processes and standards of good academic work. Academic publishing companies would never be accepted by research community without this commitment. And here, Wiley Blackwell is certainly a special and extremely successful case. Wiley Blackwell publishes 1,400 peer-reviewed journals (and of course thousands of books) in cooperation with no less than 700 academic and professional societies – a clear indication of trust and an acknowledgement of the publisher’s expertise and commitment.

If ICA and Wiley Blackwell are the organizational skeleton of this work, the authors and area editors are its flesh, its substance. An encyclopedia can only live up to the standards outlined above if the people who act as gatekeepers, judges of what is relevant to be covered, and who act as reporters on the state-of-the-art of a theory, concept, or problem have the best knowledge of this respective field and the highest academic standards. Indeed, many of those who have played the role of area editor have been presidents of ICA or
regional and national associations, division heads, ICA Fellows, or carried out other functions for which having a bird's-eye view of the field is essential. And those who have contributed as authors are the people whose name the reader will find wherever he or she researches the current literature on the subject; the key people in their area, the scholars who have done major research in their field and often the authors of milestone publications.

It is this interplay of these organizational and individual actors that in the end produces the academic authority of the ICA/Wiley Blackwell encyclopedias, in this case the Concise Encyclopedia of Communication. Of course, it also needs a researcher/manager at the helm who knits this all together so that in the end a student anywhere in the world can open the volume or log in to the website through his or her library and be sure of finding the best possible approximation to “truth”, i.e. an authoritative and up-to-date account of the evidence on the subject he or she is looking for.

The Difficult Field of Communication

Robert Craig starts the entry “Communication as a Field and Discipline” in this Encyclopedia with the sentence: “The modern field of communication is highly diverse in methods, theories, and objects of study.” Several intellectual traditions from the humanities and social sciences inform our field, and as a consequence, communication is anything but clearly defined – within countries and even more so between countries. What one encounters when starting as a student in a bachelor’s or master’s program in “communication”, or when investigating the research fields of a department with this name depends very much on the tradition and location of the department and on the people running it. Different objects, different epistemologies, different theories, and different methods – the field is still struggling with its identity and many from outside question that it ever had one in the first place. The fact that this problematic field has grown in the last half century like almost no other discipline is the best argument against its critics. Obviously, there is a strong demand for the evidence that it can supply.

We have sought to represent the diversity of the field in this encyclopedia. As there are, for some matters, contending camps challenging each other’s methods and/or evidence, not every colleague will be happy about the selection of headwords and authors or the way a subject is covered. But this reference work does not exist to make scholars happy: rather it aims to give students and other interested readers the best possible, neutral account of research. The fact that reference works and handbooks have become popular in the field of communication shows that it has, despite its problematic identity and existing disputes, reached a certain maturity, something that was not there a few decades ago.

How We Have Proceeded

This single-volume Concise Encyclopedia of Communication (CEC) builds on the twelve-volume International Encyclopedia of Communication (IEC), published in 2008. The original printed version of the IEC had 1,339 entries ranging from less than 1,000 to more than 6,000 words. Converting the IEC into the CEC meant primarily three tasks: (1) selecting headwords, (2) abridging the corresponding entries, and (3) updating their content.

As a first step the editor went back to the area editors of the IEC and asked them to name the 50 percent of headwords they deemed the most important in their area and which, therefore, they would like to see printed in a concise reference work. Most area editors made this decision. In cases where they did not respond the editor stepped in. In addition, some fine-tuning was necessary in order to avoid overlap and give sufficient coherence to the headword system. This resulted in 577 subjects covered by more than 500 authors, about 43 percent of the subjects covered in the IEC.

As the publisher imposed a word limit for the overall volume, the next step required assigning a maximum word count to each entry. We have used three length categories for the CEC entries: 400, 800, and 1,300 words, adding up to close to 400,000 words of text for the entries for the whole volume. Again, these decisions had to be made against criteria of relevance and coherence.
We contacted all authors of the entries that we kept for the CEC and asked them to abridge their original text to the assigned length and to update. As it could be anticipated that not every author would have the time or motivation to do so, the editor also offered to do this for him or her. This happened in one out of four cases. Thus, what the reader finds here is another product of a major part of the international scientific community in the field of communication.

Wolfgang Donsbach, Editor
The editor of an academic reference work certainly needs a profound overview, more a generalist than a specialist perspective on the field, and I can only hope that my talents sufficed for this. But, at least as much, the editor needs managerial skills, because such a work is anything but a one-man show. As I have indicated in the Introduction, this book is the joint product of the whole scientific community of communication – and in this definition I explicitly include people whose job is not to do research themselves but who have, in very different functions, contributed to the content.

My first thanks go to the more than 500 authors who have already contributed to the International Encyclopedia of Communication (IEC), the great majority of whom volunteered to abridge and update their entries for this concise edition (CEC). We all know that contributing to reference works is not the prime publishing task of academics today, but the majority of our authors already had such a high reputation that they could afford to let the next peer-reviewed journal article wait a while…

Almost all of the authors and the headwords of the entries they contributed were picked by the 30 area editors who already were the editorial backbone of the IEC. And I should not forget to thank the two Advisory Editors of the IEC, Jennings Bryant and Robert T. Craig, for their continuous stewardship in this whole project of ICA–Wiley Blackwell encyclopedias.

Over the ten years that we have cooperated, Elizabeth P. Swayze, Senior Editor for Communication and Media Studies at Wiley, and I have developed not only a fruitful and effective working relationship but a deep personal friendship, both built on trust, reliability, and mutual appreciation of our competencies. For this project, two other people at the Wiley office in Malden, Massachusetts, kept us on track and always gave excellent advice: Julia Kirk, Senior Project Editor for our field, and Tiffany Mok, in charge of all major reference works. On a side-note: when we started the IEC many years ago, Tiffany was an intern – she has built a remarkable career since then.

My closest ally at the Dresden office has been Anne Hennig, a graduate student in communication, who has probably been the only person who has always had a complete overview of where we were in the editorial process, of which authors were lagging behind, or where the editor himself had dropped the ball. Six weeks after we had sent all entries to the publisher, Anne gave birth to twins, another pressure on the whole project that forced us to keep to the timeline. Anja Obermüller, a junior lecturer at our department, as well as Isabelle Freiling, Johanna Haupt and Sonia Robak, research assistants, helped with proof-reading.

What we had to proof-read had gone through the hands of Felicity Marsh in the UK who organized copy-editing and Alec McAulay who did most of this job – in an amazingly fast and thorough manner. Thus, the CEC is not only
international’ in terms of its authors but also its whole production team.

Last but not least I would like to express my gratitude to a handful of people who did not directly contribute but made my contribution possible. My secretary Katrin Presberger competently organized my professional life in critical periods, and all the other colleagues at the Institute of Media and Communication at Technische Universität Dresden had to make up for contributions that, at times, I could not give. My closest friend and estimable colleague Thomas E. Patterson, professor at Harvard University’s Shorenstein Center has, as always, given a major intellectual input into everything I do, academically and in life in general.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife Eva and our now teenage son Tom who both had, once again after the ‘IEC times’, to live with a diminished family life…

Wolfgang Donsbach
Dresden, October 2014
Lexicon

A
Accountability of the Media
Accounting Research
Acculturation Processes and Communication
Action Assembly Theory
Advertisement Campaign Management
Advertising
Advertising, Cross-Cultural
Advertising, Economics of
Advertising Effectiveness
Advertising Effectiveness, Measurement of
Advertising: Global Industry
Advertising, History of
Advertising Law and Regulations
Advertising as Persuasion
Advertising: Responses across the Life-Span
Advertising Strategies
Advocacy Journalism
Affective Disposition Theories
Affects and Media Exposure
Africa: Media Systems
Age Identity and Communication
Agenda Building
Agenda-Setting Effects
Aging and Message Production and Processing
Alternative Journalism
Anime
Applied Communication Research
Appraisal Theory
Arab Satellite TV News
Archiving of Internet Content

Art as Communication
Asia: Media Systems
Attending to the Mass Media
Attitude–Behavior Consistency
Attitudes
Audience Research
Audience Segmentation
Audiences, Female
Australia: Media System

B
Bad News in Medicine, Communicating
BBC
BBC World Service
Behavioral Norms: Perception through the Media
Bi- and Multilingualism
Bias in the News
Bollywood
Book
Branding
Brands
Broadcast Journalism
Broadcast Talk

C
Cable Television
Canada: Media System
Caricature
Censorship
Censorship, History of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Management and Communication</th>
<th>Consumer Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China Central Television, Foreign Language Program of China: Media System</td>
<td>Consumers in Media Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema</td>
<td>Content Analysis, Qualitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematography</td>
<td>Content Analysis, Quantitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Journalism</td>
<td>Conversation Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Student–Teacher Interaction</td>
<td>Co-Orientation Model of Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate of Opinion</td>
<td>Copyright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNN</td>
<td>Corporate Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Corporate and Organizational Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code as Law</td>
<td>Corporate Reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Dissonance Theory</td>
<td>Correlation Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Science</td>
<td>Crime and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercialization: Impact on Media Content</td>
<td>Crisis Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodification of the Media</td>
<td>Critical Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Accommodation Theory</td>
<td>Cross-Media Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension</td>
<td>Cross-Media Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension: Intervention Techniques</td>
<td>Cultivation Effects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension and Social Anxiety</td>
<td>Cultural Imperialism Theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication: Definitions and Concepts</td>
<td>Cultural Patterns and Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication as a Field and Discipline</td>
<td>Cultural Products as Tradable Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication: History of the Idea</td>
<td>Cultural Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Inequalities</td>
<td>Culture and Communication, Ethnographic Perspectives on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Law</td>
<td>Culture: Definitions and Concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Law and Policy: Africa</td>
<td>Culture Industries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Law and Policy: Asia</td>
<td>Cyberfeminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Law and Policy: Europe</td>
<td>Cybernetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Law and Policy: Middle East</td>
<td>Communication Law and Policy: North America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Law and Policy: South America</td>
<td>Communication Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Media Studies, History of Communication Networks</td>
<td>Communication Skill Acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills across the Life-Span</td>
<td>Communication Skills across the Life-Span</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and Social Change: Research Methods</td>
<td>Communication Technology and Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Technology and Development</td>
<td>Communication Technology and Development Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicology</td>
<td>Development Communication</td>
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<td>Community Media</td>
<td>Development Communication Campaigns</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compliance Gaining</td>
<td>Development Discourse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Games and Child Development</td>
<td>Development Institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer–User Interaction</td>
<td>Development Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration in Media Systems</td>
<td>Developmental Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus-Oriented Public Relations</td>
<td>Diffusion of Information and Innovation</td>
</tr>
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<td>Construction of Reality through the News</td>
<td>Digital Divide</td>
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<td>Digital Imagery</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Digital Media, History of</td>
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<td>Discourse</td>
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<td>Discourse Analysis</td>
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<td>Discourse Comprehension</td>
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<td>Discursive Psychology</td>
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<td>Disney</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Diversification of Media Markets
Domestication of Technology

E
E-Democracy
Educational Communication
Educational Media
Educational Media Content
Educational Television, Children's Responses to
E-Government
Elaboration Likelihood Model
Election Campaign Communication
Election Surveys
Electronic Mail
Emotion and Communication in Organizations
Emotional Arousal Theory
Encoding–Decoding
Entertainment Content and Reality Perception
Environment and Social Interaction
Environmental Communication
Escapism
Ethics in Journalism
Ethnic Journalism
Ethnic Media and their Influence
Ethnicity and Exposure to Communication
Ethnography of Communication
European Union: Communication Law
Excitation and Arousal
Exemplification and Exemplars, Effects of
Expectancy Violation
Experiment, Field
Experiment, Laboratory
Exposure to Communication Content
Exposure to Print Media
Exposure to Radio
Exposure to Television
Exposure to the Internet
Extended Parallel Process Model
Extra-Media Data

F
Facebook
Fear Induction through Media Content
Federal Communications Commission (FCC)
Feminist and Gender Studies
Feminist Media
Feminist Media Studies, Transnational
Feminization of Media Content
Fiction
Field Research

Film Genres
Film Production
Film Theory
Financial Communication
Flow Theory
Framing Effects
Framing of the News
France: Media System
Freedom of Communication
Freedom of Information
Freedom of the Press, Concept of

G
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Media Studies
Gender and Discourse
Gender and Journalism
Gender: Representation in the Media
Genre
Germany: Media System
Girl Culture
Globalization of the Media
Globalization of Organizations
Globalization Theories
Goals, Cognitive Aspects of
Goals, Social Aspects of
Graphic Design
Grounded Theory
Group Communication
Group Decision-Making, Functional Theory of

H
Health Campaigns, Communication in
Health Communication
Health Communication and the Internet
Health Literacy
Hermeneutics
Historic Key Events and the Media
Hollywood

I
Iconography
Identities and Discourse
Image Restoration Theory
Imagined Interactions
India: Media System
Information
Information and Communication Technology, Economics of
Information Literacy
Information Processing
Information Processing: Self-Concept
Information Seeking
Information Society
Informational Utility
Infotainment
Ingratiation and Affinity Seeking
Institutional Theory
Instructional Television
Integrated Marketing Communications
Intellectual Property Law
Interaction
Interactivity, Concept of
Intercultural Conflict Styles and Facework
Intercultural and Intergroup Communication
Intergenerational Communication
Intergroup Accommodative Processes
Intergroup Communication and Discursive Psychology
Intergroup Contact and Communication
Intergroup Reconciliation, Processes of
Intermediality
International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)
International Communication
International Communication Agencies
International Communication Association (ICA)
International News Reporting
International Radio
International Television
Internet: International Regulation
Internet Law and Regulation
Internet News
Internet and Popular Culture
Interorganizational Communication
Interpersonal Attraction
Interpersonal Communication
Interpersonal Communication Competence and Social Skills
Interpersonal Communication, Sex and Gender Differences in
Interpersonal Conflict
Interpretative Journalism
Interview, Qualitative
Interview, Standardized
Involvement with Media Content
Issue Management
Issue Management in Politics

J
Japan: Media System
Journalism
Journalism Education
Journalism, History of
Journalism: Legal Situation
Journalists, Credibility of
Journalists’ Role Perception

K
Knowledge Gap Effects
Knowledge Management

L
Language and the Internet
Language and Social Interaction
Latin America: Media Systems
Latitude of Acceptance
Leadership in Organizations
Learning and Communication
Linguistic Pragmatics
Linguistics
Listening
Longitudinal Analysis

M
Marital Communication
Marketing
Marketing: Communication Tools
Markets of the Media
Masculinity and Media
Meaning
Measurement Theory
Media
Media Conglomerates
Media Content and Social Networks
Media Diplomacy
Media Ecology
Media Economics
Media Effects
Media Effects: Direct and Indirect Effects
Media Effects, History of
Media Effects, Strength of
Media Equation Theory
Media Events and Pseudo-Events
Media and Group Representations
Media History
Media Literacy
Media Messages and Family Communication
Media and Perceptions of Reality
Media Performance
Media Planning
Media Production and Content
Media System Dependency Theory
Media Use and Child Development
Media Use, International Comparison of
Media Use across the Life-Span
Media Use by Social Variable
Mediated Populism
Mediated Social Interaction
Mediated Terrorism
Mediavization of Politics
Medium Theory
Memory
Message Discrimination
Message Production
Meta-Analysis
Metadiscourse
Metaphor
Mexico: Media System
Minority Journalism
Mobility, Technology for
Models of Communication
Modernity
Mood Management
Music Industry

N
Narrative News Story
Negotiation and Bargaining
Network Organizations through Communication Technology
Neutrality
New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO)
News
News Agencies, History of
News Corporation
News Cycles
News Factors
News Ideologies
News Processing across the Life-Span
News Routines
News Sources
News Story
News Values

Newspaper, History of
Newspaper, Visual Design of
Nonverbal Communication and Culture

O
Objectivity in Reporting
Observation
Online Journalism
Online Media
Online Research
Open Source
Operationalization
Opinion Leader
Organization–Public Relationships
Organizational Change Processes
Organizational Communication
Organizational Communication: Critical Approaches
Organizational Communication: Postmodern Approaches
Organizational Conflict
Organizational Culture
Organizational Image
Organizations, Cultural Diversity in

P
Parasocial Interactions and Relationships
Parental Mediation Strategies
Participatory Action Research
Participatory Communication
Pedagogy, Communication in
Perceived Reality as a Social Process
Perception
Personal Communication by CMC
Personality and Exposure to Communication
Persuasion
Phenomenology
Photography
Photojournalism
Physiological Measurement
Planned Behavior, Theory of
Planned Social Change through Communication
Pluralistic Ignorance
Pluralistic Ignorance and Ideological Biases
Politainment
Politeness Theory
Political Advertising
Political Cognitions
Political Communication
| Q | Qualitative Methodology |
|   | Quality of the News |
|   | Quantitative Methodology |
|   | Questions and Questioning |

| R | Radio for Development |
|   | Radio: Social History |
Sensationalism
Sex Role Stereotypes in the Media
Sexism in the Media
Sexual Violence in the Media
Sign
Situation Comedies
Social Cognitive Theory
Social Comparison Theory
Social Conflict and Communication
Social Exchange
Social Marketing
Social Media
Social Perception
Social Stereotyping and Communication
Social Support in Interpersonal Communication
Sony Corporation
Source Protection
Special Effects
Speech Anxiety
Speech Communication, History of
Speech Fluency and Speech Errors
Spiral of Silence
Sports and the Media, History of
Standards of News
Stimulus–Response Model
Storytelling and Narration
Strategic Communication
Strategic Framing
Structuralism
Student Communication Competence
Survey

T
Tabloidization
Taste Culture
Teacher Communication Style
Teacher Influence and Persuasion
Technology and Communication
Televised Debates
Television Broadcasting, Regulation of
Television for Development
Television as Popular Culture
Television, Social History of
Television, Visual Characteristics of
Terrorism and Communication Technologies
Text and Intertextuality
Third-Person Effects
Time Warner Inc.
Transnational Civil Society
Trust of Publics
Truth and Media Content
Twitter
Two-Step Flow of Communication

U
Uncertainty and Communication
Uncertainty Management
Uncertainty Reduction Theory
UNESCO
United Kingdom: Media System
United Nations, Communication Policies of
United States of America: Media System
Uses and Gratifications

V
Validity
Video Games
Violence against Journalists
Violence as Media Content
Violence as Media Content, Effects of
Violence as Media Content, Effects on Children of
Visual Communication
Visual Culture
Visual Representation

W
War Propaganda
Watergate Scandal
Web 2.0 and the News
Women in the Media, Images of
Women's Communication and Language

Y
Youth Culture