

# THE IMPACT OF FACTUAL COMMUNICATION OR THE INFORMATION DEFICIT MODEL

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*Most of the time, communication is considered the cause of the problems that occur in the decision making process. We assume that people lack information, but they are willing to listen and learn and we omit taking into consideration that most of the time the information we deal with is difficult to understand by non-specialists. So, in order to address this issue, the deficit model suggests a one-way communication model where information flows from experts to publics in an effort to change individuals' attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. Basically, the model shows that if we instruct people in different domains, if they manage to acquire as much knowledge as possible, the learned information will change their attitudes and later, it will lead to behaviour change. However, we tend to oversee the fact that people are governed by affects which have a greater impact upon their reactions than the simple fact finding.*

**Key words:** *communication, information, information deficit model, emotions, impact, emotions, bounded rationality.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is going through an unprecedented development of information. The new, powerful technology makes its spread tremendously easy as well as the manipulation and content fabrication simple. Online networks are the best mechanism to facilitate the proliferation of the doctored and

unethical information which will quickly become viral.

The information environment is subject to a continuous change due to the social, political, economic contexts which make the environment unstable and sensitive to every source of influence and to the technological advancements which allow faster communication and access to

information. Nowadays, people have quick access to numerous sources of information, both as receivers and as transmitters, and therefore the informing (communicating) and decision making process is very dynamic and, in theory at least, based on facts not assumptions. In this article we shall try to discuss why, in spite of this favourable context, communication fails one of its main purposes, behavior change.

## 2. THE INFORMATION DEFICIT MODEL

In 1921, the editor of the newspaper named *Manchester Guardian*, these days *The Guardian*, wrote an article on the occasion of the newspaper's centenary. The essay included the following phrase "Comment is free, but facts are sacred" which has become the motto of free, unbiased press and through extrapolation, we can say that it can also be the motto of unbiased, honest communication. The editor, C. P. Scott, explained that by this statement he did not mean that reporters, writers and editors should lack conviction or feeling, but that facts should prevail and they should be committed to act in accordance to values like "honesty, cleanness, courage, fairness, and a sense of duty to the reader and the community"

[1]. Deriving from this statement, we can say that effective communication should always contain verifiable facts, less assumptions and no distortions. The information presented should be accurate and the argumentation rational with little appeal to emotions. Unfortunately, such an approach is not very useful when it comes to impact, audiences are stirred by warm emotions and not by cold facts thus factual communication would have little echo. For many years, there has been a lot of concern and preoccupation on this matter and one of the causes identified was the fact that the audience was lacking the necessary information. This theory was named *Information deficit model* (IDM).

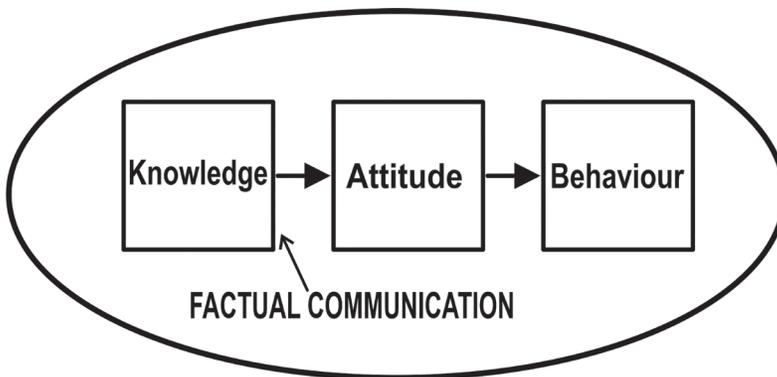
The Information deficit model is a concept that appeared in the 1980s and suggests that disseminating relevant, scientific information to the public, on important topics or matters of public concern, can result in people changing their perceptions, beliefs and attitude, thus leading to positive actions [2]. In 1993 Brian Wynne, Professor Emeritus of Science Studies and a former Research Director of the Centre for the Study of Environmental Change (CSEC) at the Lancaster University, wrote the article *Public uptake of science: a case for institutional reflexivity*, and in one of the footnotes, he pointed

out that “[t]he deficit model was a name first given to the conventional approach in a draft paper criticizing it, for a workshop in Lancaster in May 1988 of the Economic and Social Research Council- Science Policy Support Group research groups under the phase I Public Understanding of Science Research Initiative.” [3]. This model tried to explain and address the concern of scientists why the public was skeptical about scientific discoveries basing the explanation on the assumption that the audience would be more open to such novelties if they were better informed [4].

Frequently, scientists claim that a well-grounded understanding of the relevant scientific data would help the decision making process since the problems people have when taking decisions result from

the lack of information and scientific evidence. Indeed, a decision-making process based on facts and data is an ideal method however, our daily lives are filled with *on the spur* or *on a whim* decisions which are based on emotions.

In numerous situations, communication is considered the cause of the problematic decision making process and of the information gap. In such case when we assume that people lack information, but they are willing to listen and learn we omit taking into consideration that most of the time the information we deal with is difficult to understand by non-specialists. So, in order to address this, the deficit model suggests a one-way communication model where information flows from experts to publics in an effort to change individuals’ attitudes, beliefs,



**Fig.1** The impact of factual communication/  
Information Deficit Model

or behaviors. Basically, the model shows that if we instruct people in different domains, if they manage to acquire as much knowledge as possible, the learned information will change their attitudes, which on their part will lead to behaviour change. Unfortunately, this only works with particular audiences and under certain conditions. It is a very simplistic representation of the relation between knowledge – attitude – belief – behavior saying that pure facts could change behavior, as can be seen in figure number 1.

### 3. BLENDED AND ENHANCED COMMUNICATION MODELS

The problem with this model is that it ignores that most times

the actual problem the specialists lacking the ability to present their findings in such a manner that they could convince large audiences. “Information showers” will not solve the problem, what they can do is to partially correct the deficit for those interested in the specific matter, those who were already open to reflecting over things and did not have enough resources; this approach will not appeal to many others. This is the reason why information spread fails its mission to educate, to transform beliefs, to strengthen values and to change behaviors and the public ignores specialized communication. Even more, it is the reason why fake news and propaganda cannot be countered only by accurate, but cold (factual) communication and

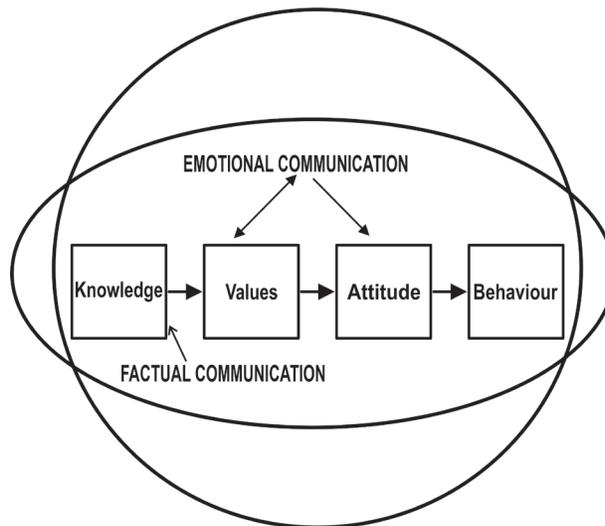
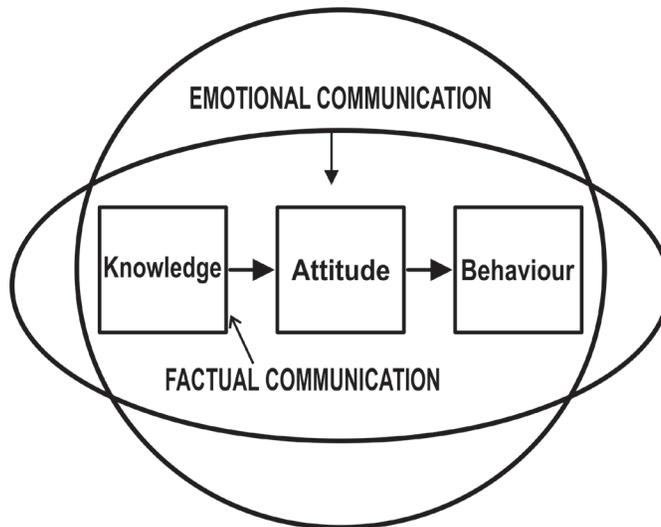


Fig. 2 Blended communication model

we should complete the model by adding the emotional factor and have a blended communication style, as can be seen in figure number 2.

public, should be done in such a manner that it reaches the audiences and is assimilated (figure no.3).



**Fig. 3** Enhanced blended communication model

Cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), Descartes' first philosophical principle should be completed by another one stating that emotions overcome reasoning most of the time. People are moved by emotions which stem from individual or common values hence, any statement that somehow contradicts or intrigues the audience will not be welcome, even more, it will be rejected. For this reason, we should combine information gap filling with the emotional appeal. Making information accessible to wide audiences, presenting it to the

Covering the information deficit brings about empowerment, people are well informed and able to take decisions on their own, but are they willing to do it? People do not live in an "aseptic" environment without any influences or biases where they are not governed by affects. Research has proven that this process is more emotional and intuitive than rational or analytical [5]. Herbert Simon revolutionized the decision theory field when he introduced *bounded rationality*, a concept stating that the decision making process has an irrational feature due to the cognitive,

information and time limitations we have, thus making it impossible to always take the optimal decision in spite of the abundance of data which can interfere with the decision path. It is very difficult to process and analyze the amount of information we have, especially when the situations are very complex and time constrained. Therefore, people developed simplified rules to help them decide, but this simplification, although necessary, leads to biases and non-rational judgments [6]. Later, Simon completed his theory by introducing the role of emotion in this process. In his essay *Making management decisions: the role of intuition and emotion* where he discusses the non-analytical decisions like those based on intuition or made under stress, “feelings of guilt, anxiety or embarrassment” [7]

More recent researches have started from the hypothesis that emotions are the lead when taking a decision [8]. Emotions that affect decision making processes are either integral or incidental. Integral emotions are those related to what impact the decision will have upon the decision maker, for example: feeling anxious about the result will make that person be more cautious

and less prone to risk, while feeling confident can trigger a bold decision. Incidental emotions are not related to the decision result, but to the environment in which decisions are taken. For example, the positive or negative feelings caused by the good or bad weather influence the mood of the decision maker and therefore, the attitude towards the matter in question.

Starting from the hypothesis presented above and using the observation and interview methods with a number of 50 people with decision making attributions, over a period of one year, we can conclude that the decision making process is always a blend of analytical and emotional aspects. Such emotions can be either beneficial guides or biases which exert effects on judgments until the matter is solved and a decision is taken. Consequently, we can state that blended communication, factual and emotional, will have a greater impact upon the audience than simple factual communication. It is not the lack of information that causes the biggest problems but, the lack of implication, people do not relate to what is communicated. Fake news, hate speech, propaganda are all based on emotions and on the

echo effect (most of the time they say what people want to hear) and online media offers them the ideal place to be because echo chambers and filter bubbles function perfectly in a virtual environment which is easily accessible and very comfortable.

### CONCLUSION

Emotions affect and motivate, lack of emotions makes communication drab. Causing a change in the audience's way of thinking can be done through adding new elements to consider to the existing points of reference. However, causing a change in the way of behaving requires something stronger and more subtle: emotions. Emotions stir behavior. When they are triggered, they influence "perception, attention, inference, learning, memory, goal choice, motivational priorities, physiological reactions, motor behaviors, and behavioral decision-making" [8,9]. Humans learn from situations they can relate to, which have an emotional impact, people are conditioned to be specific so, generalities have an emotionally reduced address and do not produce mass involvement.

It has already been established that effective communication is

sharing information while provoking reaction, stirring action, changing behavior. Therefore, a good communicator needs to have critical thinking skills as well as emotional intelligence (E.I.). Emotional intelligence is critical for both effective communication and overall business success. When emotions are well-managed, they can become a powerful tool for achieving results, to stirring to action.

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