Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory

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Social identity theory (SIT) as a social psychological theory was first introduced by Tajfel (1978) and further developed by Tajfel and Turner (1979). It proposes that individuals categorize themselves as belonging to various groups such as to a professional group, a fan base of a particular pop band, or to persons with or without children. Alongside self-categorization, individuals evaluate the groups they feel they belong to (in-groups) and groups they do not consider themselves a member of (out-groups). To determine the in-groups' and out-groups' worth, individuals constantly categorize themselves, evaluate in-groups and out-groups, and compare their value. Social categorization, group evaluation, and the value of group memberships for the self-concept constitute an individual's social identity. A positive social identity is rewarded with positive self-esteem, whereas a negative social identity is followed by ongoing competition, social mobility behaviors, or cognitive strategies to create a more positive image for the in-group. Social identity theory as a whole, and subset processes such as social categorization or social comparison, have been widely used to explain media effects. Moreover, theoretical advancements of SIT for communication have been suggested.

Self-categorization theory (SCT) was proposed by Turner (1999) and differentiates between social and personal identity. Social identity depends on an individual's group memberships. In contrast, personal identity is more or less independent of group memberships. Self-categorization theory posits that, depending on the relative salience or importance of a certain situation for social or personal identity, an individual's behavior is driven either by social or personal identity processes. Both identities can, however, be salient at the same time and trigger behavior that is motivated by a dynamic interplay of both.

The two theories can be differentiated based on their views on social and personal identity. Whereas SIT suggests a continuum of interpersonal versus intergroup behavior, SCT pronounces that both—social and personal identity processes—may be at work simultaneously. Apart from this difference, however, SIT and SCT are closely linked for several reasons. John C. Turner was Henri Tajfel's most prominent disciple in the early years of their collaboration (in the 1970s) in Bristol, UK (for a history of their work see Turner, 1996). Tajfel and Turner mutually developed and advanced SIT. Turner started working on SCT as early as 1978, and consequently SCT

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and SIT share many of the two researchers' mutually developed ideas. Both theories are social psychological and social cognitive theories rooted in the same era of social psychology. Moreover, both theories take a broad perspective on social processes. They can be neither validated nor falsified by one research design, but consist of various assumptions that aim at casting a wide perspective on identity processes. Turner and other authors such as Abrams, Brown, Hogg, Giles, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell have greatly advanced SIT—first through developments of SIT and later in the realm of SCT. In research on communication and media effects, SCT is not mentioned as often as SIT. Presumably, this is the case because most research in communication does not refer to either theory but rather to the overall paradigm of identity and intergroup behavior.

Social identity theory: Processes and predictions

Social identity theory was started as a theory of group and intergroup behavior and is based on the minimal group paradigm (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The minimal group paradigm implies that assigning individuals to groups that are "purely cognitive" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 39) may lead them to favor their assigned in-group over the out-group. A minimal group categorization could consist of wearing either a yellow or green hat. Without any other experiences with in-group or out-group apart from the color of their hats, group members should favor the in-group and allocate more resources to individuals with same-colored hats, according to the minimal group paradigm. Further theoretical work of SIT elaborates why and how individuals act as group members and how this reflects and influences their self-concept.

Seven underlying psychological principles describe SIT. These principles are logically arranged as a chronological process with several feedback loops: First, people *categorize* themselves as belonging to certain social groups such as an age group (e.g., child vs. adult vs. senior). Second, this social group is more or less *salient* in a certain context (e.g., during media use). An age group may be salient while watching a TV sitcom, because different age groups claim different rights in a family. However, it might not be at all salient while watching a movie in which only protagonists of one age group play a role. Only if psychological salience exists are further processes initiated. Third, through *social comparison*, people evaluate their salient in-group relative to relevant out-groups. Fourth, *positive distinctiveness* describes the result of social comparison. If the in-group is evaluated more positively than the out-group, people perceive positive distinctiveness. Fifth, *social identity* is defined as the combination of self-categorization and its evaluation, and it influences—sixth—an individual's *self-esteem*. Seventh, a major part of SIT's theoretical groundwork was dedicated to the consequences of this process, namely how *individual mobility*, *social creativity*, *social competition*, and *stereotyping* are affected. These strategies to reinterpret, or even change, group memberships are influenced by subjective belief structures concerning how permeable or stable a group's structure is.

Social categorization

Social categorization implies that people are defined and understood not only as individuals but also as belonging to certain social categories such as age categories (e.g., child or adult), economic categories (e.g., high or low economic status), or cultural categories (e.g., Asian or Caucasian). People socially interact based on experiences they have had with others who belong to different categories. During interaction, they constantly refine their social categories. These, in turn, influence their behavior. For instance, going to lunch with an adult triggers different behaviors than going to lunch with a young adolescent. While having lunch with either one, more experiences are collected to extend the mental representation of the existing categories. People categorize their environment to efficiently use cognitive capacities and to reduce effort for information processing. In most cases, social categorization allows for better and faster social information processing while interacting with other people. *Self-categorization* is a particular kind of social categorization. Here, an individual defines his or her own social group memberships. For example, based on the principles of social categorization, we categorize a colleague by his or her academic discipline as being an *information systems* person. Our self-categorization implies that we also count ourselves in this category. Self-categorization only becomes relevant for social identity if the individual identifies with his or her social category, meaning that the group membership is internalized as a relevant aspect of the self-concept (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Alongside social categorization, the *accentuation principle* becomes important. As members of a certain group, people accentuate the similarities of the people belonging to their in-group. At the same time, they accentuate the differences of people belonging to out-groups. It seems that they do not want to see similarities between other groups and their own group. This *accentuation principle* is a basic premise of social categorization as it highlights and emphasizes social categories (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Analogously to real-life experiences, social categories are also built, maintained, supported, questioned, or derogated during media use.

Salience of social categories

Salience implies something is at the *top of the mind* and refers to how important a social category is perceived to be in a certain situation. A group membership has to be salient to affect behavior. Salience has predominantly been studied in the context of SCT by Oakes (1987). Media make certain social categories salient and as such trigger processes of social comparison.

Social comparison

When people aim to evaluate their in-group but lack general terms or standards to compare with, they compare their in-group with out-groups (Festinger, 1954). An out-group becomes particularly relevant for comparison processes if its members are similar and proximate to in-group members (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). For instance, members of a

local sports team usually do not compare themselves with a professional sports team. Rather, a team located in the next town is the focus of comparison, as it is literally proximate and similar in terms of the dimensions that it is relevant to compare. Another boundary condition for social comparison is the relevance of the comparison dimension. Of course, the two sports teams compare themselves in terms of their performance in their respective sport, and not in terms of economic status or school grades. Media can deliver information about in-groups and out-groups and initiate social comparison processes based on this information.

Positive distinctiveness

Positive distinctiveness is defined as perceptions favoring the in-group over the out-group. Whereas *in-group favoritism* and *out-group derogation* describe the positive evaluation of the in-group and the negative evaluation of the out-group, positive distinctiveness implies the combination of both evaluations. *Intergroup discrimination* is the motive of maximizing differences between in-groups and out-groups and constitutes the basic premise of positive distinctiveness. Positive distinctiveness is an important concept for media effects research because, according to SIT, individuals strongly desire a positive evaluation of the in-group. As individuals are driven by the quest of positive distinctiveness, media offerings become important sources of information. They deliver a richness of in-group and out-group information that can easily be selected based on an individual's particular need. It has, for example, been shown that news readers from the United States and Germany who read positively valenced news about their own home country reported higher positive distinctiveness (Trepte, Schmitt & Dienlin, 2016).

Social identity

Social identity is defined as the part of the self-concept or—as Tajfel and Turner (1979, p. 40) termed it—the *self-image* that is determined by social categories. Social identity can be either positive or negative. Of course, an individual strives to gain a positive social identity with the aim of increasing self-worth and self-esteem. In other words, social identity comprises how the social categorizations and the value ascribed to particular groups are represented in an individual's self-concept. Closely linked to social identity is the term *social status*, which is frequently used by Tajfel and Turner (1979) to indicate the result of social comparison processes. Groups strive for a high social status and use several strategies to satisfy this motive. For example, they might overstate the in-group's strengths or deny the out-group's benefits and advantages. Avoiding comparison with relevant out-groups might be a strategy to save a social status.

Self-esteem

Tajfel and Turner (1979) presume that individuals strive to enhance their self-esteem. If social comparison indicates positive distinctiveness, an individual's self-esteem is

increased. In this case, no further social comparison is needed. However, if the out-group "wins" the social comparison, an individual's self-esteem is threatened. This may trigger various strategies designed to increase self-esteem, such as individual mobility, social creativity, or ongoing social competition. Later work in the field questioned the simple causality between positive social identity and self-esteem.

Hogg and Abrams (1988) suggested the *self-esteem hypothesis*. This hypothesis implies that self-esteem can be both an independent variable eliciting social comparison and a dependent variable as formulated by Tajfel and Turner (1979). To date, there is no clear evidence for either view. Further, Hogg and Abrams (1990) suggest that self-esteem or self-worth might be only one motive for social comparison among others and that alternative motives such as self-verification (the motive that my social identity is authentically reflected in my self-concept) should be given more consideration. In media research, self-esteem often is considered as an outcome of social comparison. As an exception, Tarrant, North, and Hargreaves (2001) conducted an experiment dealing with musical preferences of adolescents. They investigated the self-esteem hypothesis with two groups stemming from two different schools. Whereas preexisting self-esteem had an influence on out-group derogation, self-esteem in a postmeasure was not affected by any process of social comparison.

Individual mobility, social creativity, and social competition

Social comparison might indicate to an individual that relevant out-groups perform better in the dimensions under question. This not only hurts and leads to negative social identity but also elicits motivational processes. Either the individual or the collective of a group can take various routes to find relief for a hurt social identity and low self-esteem (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). First, as a form of individual action, the individual can leave the in-group and join another more positively valued group (*individual mobility*). This is very often difficult to accomplish with regard to social categories such as gender, ethnic background, or alumni of a certain university. Consequently, more creative strategies must be chosen (*social creativity*). Among these are comparing the in-group or the out-group on some new dimension; comparing the in-group to some other out-group that does not threaten the in-group's status; and newly interpreting the in-group's low status. A further strategy, which is most useful in coping with a low-status result of social comparison, is an ongoing *social competition* by the collective. Social competition has the aim of altering low status into a higher status and is also known as the *strategy of social change*. Many examples of vigorous competitions (e.g., gender debates) as well as pointless competitions (e.g., academic feuds) can be found. Subjective belief structures about the nature of relations between in-groups and out-groups influence which strategies are chosen. These belief structures are not factual or objective but rather are based on an individual's belief about how permeable the boundaries of a group are, how legitimate a group's status is, how accessible another group is, and how the context or a certain situation might allow for individual mobility. Reid, Giles, and Abrams (2004) suggested a model of media effects that particularly addresses how media use changes belief systems. They assume that the media representation of significant groups or leaders, and the reception of these media depictions,

leads to lower or higher identifications. These identifications, in turn, ascribe a certain status to a group and define how permeable its boundaries are. Based on status and permeability, either strategies of social mobility, creativity, or competition are chosen with the motive of creating positive distinctiveness. Most importantly, the authors suggest that not only individual actions but also collective actions, such as riots that are based on social competition motivations, might be reported in the media. Thus, all kinds of individual and collective actions might influence further in-group categorizations and evaluations.

Self-categorization theory: Processes and predictions

Self-categorization theory shares many ideas with SIT (Turner, 1999). Here, only the processes and predictions exclusively formulated or reformulated for SCT will be outlined. One of SCT's major premises is that social and personal identity are not the poles of a continuum (as more or less explicitly suggested by SIT) but that both personal and social identity can be at work and consequently guide behavior and cognitions simultaneously. In terms of SCT, personal identity refers to self-descriptions regarding personal attributes. Social identity refers to self-descriptions regarding group memberships or self-categorizations. The self is accordingly perceived as being determined by both personal and social identities. Particularly, four processes—self-categorization, salience, depersonalization, and individuality—have been proposed and examined.

Self-categorization

The basic process described in SCT is self-categorization. "Self-categorization is an active, interpretative, judgmental process, reflecting a complex and creative interaction between motives, expectations, knowledge and reality" (Turner, 1999, p. 31). It defines individuality, but not necessarily in the sense that categories are permanent and foster an everlasting self-image. The theory pronounces that, depending on a situation and its meaning, personal and social identities can stay the same over time but may also vary. The social category an individual feels he or she belongs to might change its relevance very quickly. While watching a film, self-categorization as a woman (vs. the category of man) might initially be relevant but in the next second the self-categorization as a good person (vs. the category of villains) might become relevant. The category good persons then includes both genders. It might either overrun the first perceived self-categorization as a woman in terms of salience, or both categories could work in parallel to determine how the spectator ascribes meaning to the film.

Salience

The concept of salience in SCT describes when a certain context or situation is interpreted and given meaning in terms of specific social and personal identities. Salience

defines the boundary conditions of social and personal identity processes and determines the extent to which either one or both guide an individual's behavior in a certain situation. A situation or context may underline the importance of a certain social category and thus functions as a cue reminding a person of his or her respective group membership. This cue triggers stimulus salience. Afterwards, it initiates psychological salience of an individual's belonging to a certain group and as such social identity processes. Media can contain several stimuli regarding social categories that are relevant to a media recipient and thereby influence perception and behavior. Which social category becomes salient in the richness of situational cues is usually determined by the interaction of accessibility and fit. Oakes (1987) suggests that, first, a social category must be accessible, emotionally relevant, or of central value to an individual. Then, there should be a fit between the individual's understanding of the social category and how it is represented as a social cue. Further, Turner (1999) notes that salience is "relative" in how it influences behavior as being motivated by either personal or social identity. Media representations and even program information can make certain group characteristics and group memberships salient.

Depersonalization and individuality

When a certain social identity becomes salient and thus persons perceive themselves as group members, they might overly accentuate their similarities with the other group members. The self-perception becomes depersonalized. Turner (1984) once termed this process the "cognitive redefinition of the self" (p. 528), meaning that an individual will redefine his or her self-concept according to the needs, peculiarities, and norms of the in-group. This process of redefinition thus turns individual behavior into collective behavior. Whereas the term *depersonalization* indicates that self-perception is dominated by social identity, the term *personalization*—often interchangeable with *individuality*—can be used to indicate that a behavior or self-perception is determined by personal identity. Depending on the level of depersonalization, group behaviors such as collective action or group cohesiveness are produced. As stated above, a certain situational cue or context does not necessarily elicit highly predictable or universal behaviors and cognitions. Rather, both depersonalization and individuality vary across situations, meaning that they are dynamic, variable, and context-dependent. The social identity model of deindividuation effects is an important further development of SCT that has stimulated much research in both psychology and communication (Spears, Lea, & Lee, 1990). It explains how, in computer-mediated communication, settings trigger behavior that is motivated either by group norms or by individual considerations.

Social identity theory and self-categorization theory in media effects research

Social and self-categorization, social comparison, positive distinctiveness, social identity, and self-esteem belong to the most crucial social psychological concepts that

help us to understand and explain media selection and media effects. Assumptions based on SIT and SCT are studied across various media genres (e.g., entertainment and information), across differing media content (e.g., advertisements, health, politics, and science), and with regard to diverse social categories (e.g., age, gender, nationality, opinion regarding an issue, partisanship, and skin color). The theories are used to explain all kinds of behaviors (e.g., media use) and cognitions (e.g., attention and knowledge). To date, most work referring to SIT and SCT in communication has been empirical and has looked at how singular components affect either selective exposure or media effects. Research including the whole set of processes suggested by the theories, however, is scarce. And, as has been said, this cannot be the requirement for "grand theories" such as SIT or SCT. With regard to theoretical approaches, Trepte, Schmitt, and Dienlin (2016) proposed the *social identity model of media effects*, which summarizes SIT's basic premises and applies them to media use. The social identity model of media effects posits that, when a person is exposed to media content, one or more in-groups will become salient to this person. On the basis of what the media offers, the person not only categorizes but also evaluates the respective in-group through comparison of in-group and out-group. By engaging in social comparison, the individual aims to gain positive distinctiveness. In other words, the individual wants to come to a positive evaluation of the in-group. Hence, media use nurtures two motives: First, it plays into a person's positive social identity. Second, it increases an individual's self-esteem as a consequence of media use.

The existing empirical research refers somewhat more often to SIT than to SCT, or often to both, and—as already mentioned—usually focuses on specific parts of the theories. Most studies use an experimental research approach. Moreover, it stands out that, even though some studies still focus on main effects (e.g., of in-group salience in a media content), the focus in current work has turned more and more to an examination of moderating or mediating mechanisms. In the following, some examples from studies based on SIT and SCT are outlined in order to illustrate, in greater detail, how the theoretical assumptions are empirically implemented and tested. For reasons of space, not all relevant research can be mentioned.

Social identity theory, self-categorization theory, and media exposure

Weaver (2011) studied how the skin color of movie casts influences selective exposure as an in-group cue, in order to understand why movies with Black casts often tend to fail in gaining large audiences. His results showed that skin color did not necessarily determine whether media contents were selected. Two experiments examined possible interacting mechanisms. In the first study, White communication students answered an implicit racial attitude scale and rated their movie viewing frequency. Afterwards, they read several short movie descriptions that varied as to whether the cast was made up of Blacks and/or Whites. The participants were randomly assigned to conditions in which these movie descriptions either contained celebrities or noncelebrities as actors. Finally, they were asked how interested they were in seeing the movies. Contrary to expectations, in an overall analysis, the cast's skin color did not influence interest. However,

including further variables revealed a more complex picture. The White study participants who scored high on implicit racial prejudice were more interested in movies with White than with Black protagonists, while participants low in prejudice preferred Black over White casts. Hence, skin color might be a more salient cue indicating in-group relevance for high-prejudice individuals. When casts contained celebrities, heavy movie viewers were more interested in White than Black casts, but light movie viewers had no such preference. When casts contained noncelebrities, movie viewing frequency did not interact with the cast's skin color. Weaver interpreted these findings as follows: As the majority of race-neutral roles in movies is played by White actors, many known Black actors might appear mostly in films on race-related themes. Thus, White regular movie viewers might associate these actors with themes they consider as irrelevant for their in-group, whereas nonregular viewers might not have established such an association.

In a laboratory experiment with Black as well as White students, Appiah, Knobloch-Westerwick, and Alter (2013) examined selective exposure more directly by tracking the selection of, and time spent with, news articles varying in valence (positive vs. negative) and news character skin color (Black vs. White). Among Black students, contrary to the authors' hypothesis, no "social identity enhancement" was revealed (i.e., the participants did not spend more time on positive than negative news featuring Blacks). However, the authors found support for in-group favoritism (i.e., Black students spent more time on positive news featuring Blacks than on positive and negative news featuring Whites) and out-group derogation (i.e., Black students spent more time on negative than positive news featuring Whites). White students, in contrast, were equally inclined to read stories about Blacks and Whites irrespective of the news' valence. The authors argued that this selective exposure effects among Black students might have arisen due to their perceiving their own in-group as stigmatized and of lower status as well as identifying more strongly with their in-group.

Social identity theory, self-categorization theory, and media effects

Hartmann and Tanis (2013) referred to SIT in order to advance research on the *hostile media effect* (HME). They suggested that the HME can be conceptualized as an intergroup phenomenon. In two studies, they first asked participants about their stance regarding abortion and regarded this position as a group membership (i.e., according to their stance on the issue, participants were categorized either as belonging to the in-group *pro-life* or the in-group *pro-choice*). Further, they assessed the strength of respective group identification. Second, they experimentally manipulated group status—for example, by describing in a news article that either the pro-choice viewpoint or the pro-life viewpoint was supported by the majority of highly educated people. Third, participants read an article on abortion that was intended to be balanced toward both viewpoints. Finally, participants evaluated the article's perceived message tendency as well as their perceived group status as a manipulation check. As hypothesized, on average, readers evaluated the article as biased and less agreeable toward their in-group (i.e., the HME). However, this was the case only for individuals who strongly identified with their in-group and for individuals whose in-group status was perceived as being low

(study one) or was designated as low by the news article (study two). These results indicate that social identity processes such as group identification and perceived in-group status can help to explain under which conditions the HME is likely to be present or specifically pronounced. It has to be noted, though, that the effect sizes were small in the reported experiments.

Reid (2012) also addressed the HME in a series of experiments, based on specific SCT assumptions. The first experiment, for example, examined the effect of salience. Reid measured US students' political party preference (Republican vs. Democrat) and then allocated them to one of three conditions. The conditions were designed to induce salience of different self-categorizations (control vs. political identity salient vs. American identity salient). This salience manipulation was achieved with a short text preceding the questionnaire. Subsequently, participants rated media bias with regard to the political parties. As hypothesized, the HME increased as a function of identification with the political party and identity salience. When political identity had been made salient, the relationship between party preference and perceived media bias directed at the in-group was stronger than when no political references had been made. When American identity had been made salient, the correlation between party preference and perceived media bias decreased compared to the control condition.

Mastro (2003) examined social judgments in reaction to stereotypical media messages regarding Latino characters. Pretests revealed that criminality was the most prominent stereotype of Latinos. In Mastro's first study, White student participants were confronted with a crime drama script portraying an unquestionably guilty main character involved in a murder. This character was either Latino or White. Afterwards, they rated their racial in-group identification as well as their perceptions of crime legitimacy, their self-esteem, and finally their opinion on the guilt of the character as a control variable. Contrary to the author's prediction, the in-group (i.e., White) character was not favored against the out-group (i.e., Latino) character as there was no difference in the perception of the legitimacy of the crime between conditions. However, taking racial identification into account, a positive correlation was revealed between racial identification and crime justification in the White-character condition that was absent in the Latino-character condition. Inconsistently with the author's hypothesis, no difference in self-esteem between conditions emerged. In a second study, White participants viewed a movie segment with a clearly guilty drug dealer who was either Latino or White. The same measures as in the first study were applied. This time, the first hypothesis was supported: The White character received greater crime justification than the Latino character. No interaction with racial identification was revealed. Further, support for the self-esteem hypothesis was found: Participants exposed to the Latino criminal rated their self-esteem higher than participants exposed to the White criminal. Summarizing both studies, it has to be noted that the results were not univocally consistent with the predictions Mastro derived from SIT.

Joyce and Harwood (2014) studied SIT processes in the context of persuasive messaging in public health campaigns. They randomly assigned undergraduate students to one of two versions of a message on sexting (i.e., the practice of sharing sexually explicit pictures and language over cellphone or through email) that was supposed to induce a negative attitude toward sexting. The identical message was framed either as

a viral user-generated video (UGV; i.e., stemming from peers as an in-group) or as a government-sponsored public service announcement (PSA; i.e., stemming from an out-group). Subsequently, participants rated the message's quality, their identification in terms of perceived similarity with the message creator, and their attitudes toward sexting. The authors tested a path model comprising seven hypotheses. Contrary to Hypothesis 1, the message framed as a UGV did not lead to more negative attitudes toward sexting than the message framed as a PSA (i.e., there was no direct effect of message condition). Consistent with Hypothesis 2, however, the participants rated the message's quality higher in the UGV than the PSA condition. No support was found for Hypothesis 3: Perceived message quality did not predict message-consistent attitudes. Further, contrary to Hypothesis 4, participants in the UGV condition did not perceive the creators of the message as more similar to themselves than participants in the PSA condition. Supporting Hypothesis 5, greater perceived similarity with the message creators was associated with less positive attitudes about sexting. Consistent with Hypothesis 6, perceived message quality predicted perceived similarity with the message creators. Finally, condition (UGV vs. PSA) indirectly predicted message-consistent attitudes through perceived message quality and identification, which supported Hypothesis 7. The authors concluded that both a positive quality assessment and identification with the messenger are necessary for peer-generated messages to be more persuasive than messages from official institutions.

Future directions

As "grand theories" of identity, SIT and SCT can help us to understand a wide array of media effects phenomena. They address basic principles and premises of media use such as exposure to in-group media, social comparison processes, stereotyping during and after media use, evaluation of media content based on group memberships, and self-esteem as a variable influencing media exposure as well as media effects. The range of questions that has been dealt with is vast. However, not all aspects of SIT and SCT have been similarly referred to in media research so far. First, as shown in this entry, neither SIT nor SCT are considered as a whole. Rather, singular processes, such as social comparison (SIT) and salience (SCT), are studied in isolation. There are some premises and processes that are typically left out of communication research. Strategies to cope with negative social identity—such as individual mobility, social creativity, and competition—have rarely been addressed. Additionally, the group-level approach is often overlooked in empirical research on media effects. For instance, Reid, Giles, and Abrams (2004) have made theoretical propositions on how group vitality, group boundaries, and strategies of social mobility or creativity are related to media use. However, there has not been much empirical research on these aspects of SIT and SCT.

Future research holds many challenges. It seems particularly tempting to take a more granular look at the underlying processes of how identity influences media use and media use influences identity. The question of how exactly group memberships and media use are interrelated still needs exploration. What are the cognitive and emotional processes that are triggered by group memberships? What are the boundary conditions

of group memberships? In SIT and SCT lies tremendous potential to further unveil the social pattern of media use.

SEE ALSO: Media Representation: Minorities; Media Representation: Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes; Online Identity Construction; Social Comparison Theory; Social Information Processing Theory and Hyperpersonal Perspective

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