

## A maturing discipline:

The development of comprehensive theories and designs in communication research

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Communications is still a young discipline. But it is maturing. For over one hundred years - when taking the start of academic journalism education at universities as the starting point - our field has been struggling with its status at institutions of higher education. Some of these struggles were caused by the snobbism and/or bigotry of other, already existing disciplines. Some of these were home-made by the field itself. One of the home-made problems was the lack of a truly intellectual, research-based education and training for professional communicators. It has led, on the one side, to a sub-optimal preparation of journalists for their societal tasks, and on the other side to a rather low status in academic institutions who have embraced the cash-flow from high number of students but not the intellectual and research input of their professors. The second home-made problem has been the superficiality of many of our theories. The mainstream of communication research has been - what I would call - 'input-output-relations': we were interested primarily in the relationships between content on the one side and either exposure or cognitions on the other side. However, we have treated the causalities between these relationships as a black box. News value theory or the majority of media effects theories are cases in point. I argue that this is changing and that communications is now advancing to a discipline in which more comprehensive theories, i.e. theories that are shedding light into the back box and try to understand the 'reasons behind the reasons' are developing.