

seven traditions of communication theory

Seven Traditions of Communication Theory: Exploring the Foundations of Human Interaction

seven traditions of communication theory provide a fascinating lens through which we can understand the complex ways humans exchange information, create meaning, and build relationships. These traditions offer diverse perspectives on communication, ranging from the study of messages and symbols to the exploration of power dynamics and social structures. Whether you're a student, professional, or simply curious about how communication shapes our world, delving into these foundational traditions can enrich your understanding of everyday interactions and the broader social fabric.

In this article, we'll explore each of the seven traditions of communication theory, unpacking their core ideas, relevance, and how they help explain different facets of communication. Along the way, we'll weave in important concepts like interpersonal communication, rhetoric, social context, and media influence to create a well-rounded picture.

Understanding the Seven Traditions of Communication Theory

The concept of the seven traditions of communication theory originally emerged as a way to categorize the diverse approaches scholars use to study communication. These traditions highlight the multifaceted nature of communication, emphasizing that no single theory can fully encompass its complexity. Each tradition offers unique insights and analytical tools that can be applied in various contexts—from everyday conversations to mass media and organizational communication.

1. The Rhetorical Tradition: The Art of Persuasion

At the heart of the rhetorical tradition lies the ancient art of persuasion. Rooted in classical Greek philosophy, this tradition views communication primarily as a means to influence an audience through effective speaking and writing. Think of famous orators like Cicero or Aristotle, who emphasized *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (logic) as essential components of persuasive communication.

In today's world, the rhetorical tradition remains relevant in political speeches, advertising, and public relations. Understanding rhetorical strategies can help you craft compelling messages and critically evaluate the

persuasive techniques used around you.

2. The Semiotic Tradition: Communication as the Study of Signs

Semiotics dives into how meaning is created and interpreted through signs and symbols. This tradition focuses on the relationship between the signifier (the form of a word, image, or gesture) and the signified (the concept it represents). For example, a stop sign is more than just a red octagon; it signifies the social rule to halt.

This approach is especially valuable when analyzing media, language, and cultural symbols. It helps explain how different communities might interpret the same message in diverse ways, highlighting the role of context and shared understanding in communication.

3. The Phenomenological Tradition: Emphasizing Personal Experience

The phenomenological tradition centers on the lived experience of individuals and how they perceive and make sense of communication. Rather than focusing on messages themselves, it emphasizes empathy, dialogue, and authentic understanding between people.

In interpersonal communication, this tradition encourages us to suspend our assumptions and truly engage with others' perspectives. It's a reminder that effective communication often involves more listening than speaking, fostering deeper connections and mutual respect.

4. The Cybernetic Tradition: Communication as a System

Drawing from systems theory and information science, the cybernetic tradition views communication as a process of information flow within a system. This tradition emphasizes feedback loops, noise (disruptions), and the mechanisms that make communication effective or ineffective.

Cybernetic principles are crucial in fields like organizational communication, computer-mediated communication, and network theory. Recognizing the role of feedback, for instance, can improve how we manage conversations, meetings, or even social media interactions by ensuring clarity and responsiveness.

5. The Socio-Psychological Tradition: Communication and Human Behavior

The socio-psychological tradition investigates how communication influences and is influenced by human behavior, attitudes, and social psychology. It often involves studying cause-and-effect relationships, such as how persuasion impacts belief change or how nonverbal cues affect interpersonal dynamics.

This tradition provides valuable insights for conflict resolution, negotiation, and marketing by analyzing patterns in how individuals respond to messages. It's grounded in empirical research and seeks to predict communication outcomes based on psychological factors.

6. The Socio-Cultural Tradition: Communication as Social Construction

This tradition explores how communication both shapes and is shaped by culture, social norms, and collective identities. It emphasizes that reality is constructed through interaction, and language plays a fundamental role in maintaining or challenging social structures.

By focusing on the socio-cultural tradition, we gain a better understanding of issues like intercultural communication, identity formation, and social power dynamics. It encourages awareness of diversity and the complexities of communicating across different cultural contexts.

7. The Critical Tradition: Communication and Power

Finally, the critical tradition examines communication through the lens of power, ideology, and social change. It critiques how communication practices can perpetuate inequalities and calls for transformative action to challenge dominant systems.

This tradition is especially prominent in media studies, gender studies, and political communication. It pushes us to question whose voices are heard, whose are silenced, and how communication can either reinforce or disrupt oppression.

Why the Seven Traditions Matter in Today's Communication Landscape

Understanding the seven traditions of communication theory isn't just an

academic exercise. These frameworks equip us with tools to navigate the increasingly complex communication environments we face—from digital platforms to multicultural workplaces. For example:

- Applying rhetorical strategies can enhance your ability to present ideas persuasively in professional settings.
- Semiotic awareness sharpens your understanding of branding and media messages.
- Phenomenological insights improve empathy and conflict resolution skills.
- Cybernetic principles help manage feedback and information flow in team projects.
- Socio-psychological knowledge aids in decoding behaviors during negotiations.
- Socio-cultural sensitivity fosters inclusivity in diverse groups.
- Critical theory inspires advocacy for equity and ethical communication practices.

By blending these traditions, communicators can approach challenges holistically and adapt their strategies to suit different audiences and purposes.

Tips for Integrating the Seven Traditions in Your Communication Practice

If you're keen on applying these traditions in real life, here are some practical tips:

1. **Analyze your audience:** Use rhetorical and socio-cultural insights to tailor messages that resonate culturally and emotionally.
2. **Be mindful of symbols:** Consider semiotic meanings to avoid misunderstandings, especially in cross-cultural contexts.
3. **Practice active listening:** Embrace phenomenological approaches to truly understand others' viewpoints.
4. **Seek feedback:** Employ cybernetic principles to improve communication loops and clarify messages.
5. **Observe behavior:** Draw from socio-psychological research to anticipate reactions and adapt accordingly.
6. **Challenge assumptions:** Use critical tradition perspectives to identify and address biases or power imbalances in communication.

Incorporating these strategies can make your communication more effective, ethical, and meaningful.

The seven traditions of communication theory provide a rich tapestry of perspectives that illuminate the multifaceted nature of human interaction. Embracing these traditions not only deepens our theoretical knowledge but also enhances our practical communication skills in a world that's more interconnected and diverse than ever before.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the Seven Traditions of Communication Theory?

The Seven Traditions of Communication Theory are a framework proposed by Robert T. Craig that categorizes communication theories into seven distinct traditions: Socio-Psychological, Cybernetic, Rhetorical, Semiotic, Socio-Cultural, Critical, and Phenomenological.

Who developed the Seven Traditions of Communication Theory?

Robert T. Craig developed the Seven Traditions of Communication Theory as a way to organize and understand the diverse field of communication studies.

What does the Socio-Psychological tradition focus on in communication theory?

The Socio-Psychological tradition focuses on individual behavior and how communication influences and is influenced by psychological processes such as cognition, perception, and attitudes.

How does the Cybernetic tradition approach communication?

The Cybernetic tradition views communication as a system of information processing and feedback mechanisms, emphasizing how messages are transmitted, received, and how noise affects communication.

What is the main concern of the Rhetorical tradition in communication theory?

The Rhetorical tradition centers on persuasion and the art of effective public speaking, focusing on how speakers use language and symbols to influence audiences.

Can you explain the Semiotic tradition in the context of communication?

The Semiotic tradition studies communication as the process of creating meaning through signs and symbols, examining how language and other symbols convey messages and cultural meanings.

What does the Socio-Cultural tradition emphasize in communication?

The Socio-Cultural tradition emphasizes how communication shapes and is shaped by social structures, cultural norms, and shared meanings within a community.

How does the Critical tradition differ from other communication traditions?

The Critical tradition focuses on power dynamics, ideology, and social injustice in communication, aiming to uncover and challenge oppressive structures within society.

What is the Phenomenological tradition about in communication theory?

The Phenomenological tradition explores personal experience and dialogue, emphasizing the subjective interpretation and understanding of communication events.

Why is the Seven Traditions framework important for studying communication?

The Seven Traditions framework is important because it provides a comprehensive and organized way to understand the diverse perspectives in communication theory, facilitating interdisciplinary research and application.

Additional Resources

Seven Traditions of Communication Theory: A Comprehensive Exploration

seven traditions of communication theory serve as a foundational framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of human communication. Developed initially by communication scholar Robert T. Craig, these traditions provide a structured lens through which academics and professionals can analyze the complexities of interpersonal, group, organizational, and mass communication. By categorizing communication theories into seven distinct traditions, Craig

offers an inclusive approach that captures the diversity of perspectives within the field. This article delves deeply into these traditions, examining their origins, key characteristics, and contemporary relevance, while incorporating relevant terminology such as communication models, interpersonal communication theories, rhetorical analysis, and communication paradigms.

Understanding the Seven Traditions of Communication Theory

The seven traditions of communication theory encompass a broad spectrum of communication studies, each emphasizing different elements of the communicative process. This theoretical framework not only clarifies distinct approaches but also highlights how these perspectives intersect or diverge in explaining communication phenomena. Within academic discourse, the traditions assist scholars in situating their research under specific paradigms, facilitating clearer debate and synthesis.

1. The Rhetorical Tradition

The rhetorical tradition traces its roots back to ancient Greece and is primarily concerned with persuasion and the art of discourse. It views communication as a practical art aimed at influencing audiences through symbolic messages. Central figures like Aristotle shaped this tradition by outlining strategies such as ethos, pathos, and logos, which remain foundational in rhetorical analysis today.

This tradition is heavily utilized in fields like political communication, public speaking, and advertising, where the effectiveness of message delivery and audience response are paramount. The rhetorical tradition emphasizes the speaker's credibility and the contextual elements that impact persuasion, making it a critical lens for examining communication strategies in various domains.

2. The Semiotic Tradition

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols as elements of communication, forms the basis of the semiotic tradition. This approach explores how meaning is constructed and understood through language, images, gestures, and other sign systems. The tradition is grounded in the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, who elaborated on signifier-signified relationships and the interpretive processes involved.

In contemporary communication studies, this tradition aids in decoding media

content, advertising messages, and cultural artifacts. It highlights the arbitrariness of signs and the role of social conventions in meaning-making, prompting deeper investigation into how communication shapes and reflects societal values.

3. The Phenomenological Tradition

The phenomenological tradition centers on the lived experience of individuals and the subjective interpretation of communication events. It focuses on dialogue, empathy, and the co-creation of meaning between participants. This tradition draws heavily from existential philosophy and emphasizes authenticity and understanding in interpersonal communication.

Researchers employing this tradition often analyze face-to-face interactions, exploring how personal biases, emotions, and perceptions influence the communicative exchange. It provides valuable insights into conflict resolution, counseling, and therapeutic communication by prioritizing the human dimension of interaction.

4. The Cybernetic Tradition

Emerging from the study of systems and information theory, the cybernetic tradition conceptualizes communication as a process of information transmission and feedback within complex systems. It views communication as a mechanism for regulating and controlling interactions, emphasizing the flow and processing of messages.

This tradition is particularly relevant in the analysis of technological communication systems, such as computer networks and organizational communication structures. It provides a framework for understanding noise, feedback loops, and the efficiency of communication channels, which are critical in today's digital and corporate environments.

5. The Socio-Psychological Tradition

The socio-psychological tradition examines communication through the lens of individual behavior and psychological processes. It investigates how attitudes, personality traits, and social influences shape communication patterns and outcomes. This tradition relies heavily on empirical research and quantitative methods to explore cause and effect relationships.

Communication models derived from this tradition include persuasion theories, social cognition frameworks, and interpersonal communication theories. It offers practical applications in marketing, health communication, and organizational behavior, where understanding individual differences can

enhance message effectiveness and interpersonal dynamics.

6. The Socio-Cultural Tradition

The socio-cultural tradition focuses on the ways communication constructs and is constructed by social reality, culture, and identity. Rooted in symbolic interactionism, it highlights how shared language and social practices create and maintain community norms and worldviews.

This tradition is instrumental in cross-cultural communication studies, media analysis, and identity politics research. It draws attention to power dynamics, cultural conflicts, and the role of communication in social change, offering a critical perspective on how communication reinforces or challenges societal structures.

7. The Critical Tradition

The critical tradition challenges existing social orders and power relations through communication analysis. It emphasizes emancipation, social justice, and the critique of ideology embedded in language and media. Originating from Marxist theory and the Frankfurt School, this tradition interrogates how communication perpetuates domination and inequality.

Scholars in this tradition use discourse analysis, ideological critique, and cultural studies to uncover hidden agendas and promote transformative change. Its relevance is pronounced in media criticism, activism, and policy analysis, where communication is both a tool of control and potential resistance.

Implications and Applications of the Seven Traditions

Understanding the seven traditions of communication theory enables professionals and researchers to select appropriate frameworks for their specific objectives. For example, a corporate communication strategist might blend the socio-psychological and cybernetic traditions to optimize message delivery and audience engagement. Conversely, a media scholar could apply the semiotic and critical traditions to dissect cultural narratives and power structures in news reporting.

The diversity of these traditions also underscores the interdisciplinary nature of communication studies, intersecting with psychology, sociology, linguistics, philosophy, and information technology. Each tradition offers unique methodologies and analytical tools, from qualitative interviews and

ethnography to statistical modeling and textual analysis.

Comparative Features of the Traditions

- **Focus:** Ranges from individual cognition (socio-psychological) to societal structures (critical).
- **Methodology:** Includes qualitative approaches (phenomenological) and quantitative research (socio-psychological).
- **Objective:** Varies between understanding communication processes (cybernetic) and advocating for social change (critical).
- **Scope:** Covers micro-level interpersonal interactions to macro-level cultural and ideological systems.

These distinctions reflect the complex nature of communication as an academic discipline and practical field, necessitating nuanced approaches for different contexts.

Integrating the Traditions in Contemporary Communication Research

Modern communication challenges, such as misinformation, digital media influence, and intercultural interaction, benefit from the integrative use of the seven traditions. For instance, combating fake news requires understanding the rhetorical construction of messages alongside the cybernetic transmission of information and the socio-cultural contexts that shape audience reception.

Moreover, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and virtual reality introduce new dimensions to the cybernetic tradition, while the socio-cultural and critical traditions remain vital in addressing ethical concerns and social implications.

By applying the seven traditions of communication theory, practitioners can better navigate the evolving landscape of communication, ensuring that strategies are both effective and socially responsible.

In sum, the seven traditions of communication theory provide an essential roadmap for comprehending the diverse and dynamic field of communication. Their continued relevance is evident as communication evolves in complexity and scope, demanding a multifaceted and critical approach to understanding how humans connect, influence, and transform their world.

Seven Traditions Of Communication Theory

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2025-08-07 Surveying the extraordinary scope of contemporary theory, Jeffrey R. Di Leo brings together contributors from around the world to speak to the ways in which theoretical concerns from a variety of disciplines operate within their respective fields of concern. Contemporary theory is a multi- and inter-disciplinary endeavour that operates within and among the humanities, the social sciences, and many of the professions. In addition to its now somewhat more standard-fare work in these areas, it has also made substantial inroads into the natural sciences and the formal sciences. To be sure, more disciplines from across the academy have integrated theory into their practice than at any other time in history. Di Leo and his fellow contributors survey the workings of contemporary theory within and among the humanities, sciences, and professions, including contributions on literary studies, film studies, gender studies, visual art, law, biology and geology. They bring together distinguished theorists whose work spans the academy to speak to the ways in which theoretical concerns from a variety of disciplines work within their respective fields of concern.

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Communication Theory and Philosophy, 4 Volume Set Klaus Bruhn Jensen, Robert T. Craig,

Jefferson D. Pooley, Eric W. Rothenbuhler, 2016-10-31 The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy is the definitive single-source reference work on the subject, with state-of-the-art and in-depth scholarly reflection on key issues from leading international experts. It is available both online and in print. A state-of-the-art and in-depth scholarly reflection on the key issues raised by communication, covering the history, systematics, and practical potential of communication theory Articles by leading experts offer an unprecedented level of accuracy and balance Provides comprehensive, clear entries which are both cross-national and cross-disciplinary in nature The Encyclopedia presents a truly international perspective with authors and positions representing not just Europe and North America, but also Latin America and Asia Published both online and in print Part of The Wiley Blackwell-ICA International Encyclopedias of Communication series, published in conjunction with the International Communication Association. Online version available at www.wileyicaencyclopedia.com

seven traditions of communication theory: Health Communication Theory Teresa L.

Thompson, Peter J. Schulz, 2021-02-10 Assembles the most important theories in the field of health communication in one comprehensive volume, designed for students and practitioners alike Health Communication Theory is the first book to bring together the theoretical frameworks used in the study and practice of creating, sending, and receiving messages relating to health processes and health care delivery. This timely volume provides easy access to the key theoretical foundations on which health communication theory and practice are based. Students and future practitioners are taught how to design theoretically-grounded research, interventions, and campaigns, while established scholars are presented with new and developing theoretical frameworks to apply to their work. Divided into three parts, the volume first provides a summary and history of the field, followed by an overview of the essential theories and concepts of health communication, such as Problematic Integration Theory and the Cultural Variance Model. Part Two focuses on interpersonal communication and family interaction theories, provider-patient interaction frameworks, and public relations and organizational theories. The final part of the volume centers on theories relevant to information processing and cognition, affective impact, behavior, message effects, and socio-psychology and sociology. Edited by two internationally-recognized experts with extensive editorial and scholarly experience, this first-of-its-kind volume: Provides original chapters written by a group of global scholars working in health communication theory Covers theories unique to interpersonal and organizational contexts, and to health campaigns and media issues Emphasizes the interdisciplinary and collaborative nature of health communication research Includes overviews of basic health communication theory and application Features commentary on future directions in health communication theory Health Communication Theory is an indispensable resource for advanced undergraduate and graduate students studying health communication, and for both new

and established scholars looking to familiarize themselves with the area of study or seeking a new theoretical frameworks for their research and practice.

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seven traditions of communication theory: A Communication Universe Igor E. Klyukanov, 2010-09-02 A Communication Universe: Manifestations of Meaning, Stagings of Significance presents a new theoretical understanding of communication. Igor E. Klyukanov conceptualizes the process of communication in terms of space and time, i.e., as a continuous process of meaningful spatiotemporal transformation. He goes on to examine four fundamental transformations and the four theoretical perspectives on the nature of communication. From the first perspective communication appears to be pure space, then time comes into play more and more actively, and from the fourth perspective communication appears to be pure time. Following the fourth transformation communication is seen as returning back to the first stage where it again appears as pure space; however, now its reality contains all meanings created in the process of the previous transformations. Based on these four transformations, the process of communication is understood as a universe, meaning whole, entire, turned into one.

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understand how people of faith can and should work together in today's tumultuous world. In *A Communication Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue*, fifteen authors present their experiences and analyses of interfaith dialogue, and contextualize interfaith work within the frame of rhetorical and communication studies. While the focus is on the Abrahamic faiths, these essays also include discussion of Hinduism and interracial faith efforts. Each chapter incorporates communication theories that bring clarity to the practices and problems of interfaith communication. Where other interfaith books provide theological, political, or sociological insights, this volume is committed to the perspectives contained in communication scholarship. Interfaith dialogue is best imagined as an organic process, and it does not require theological heavyweights gathered for academic banter. As such, this volume focuses on the processes and means by which interfaith meaning is produced.

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interprofessional competencies

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Kehbuma Langmia, 2024-10-12 This second volume of Black Communication Theory extends the Black communication sphere to include digital as well as non-digital modes of communication for the Black community on the continent of Africa and the Diaspora. The authors of this edition have been able to build on from the conceptualizations enshrined within the first volume and expanded it to include other Black communication contexts be they on gender, race, ethnicity, or class. Continuing the journey of populating the Black communication public and private sphere on the cyberspace as well as non-cyberspaces, this volume will provide an invaluable resource to students and researchers of Afrocentric communication theories. This is the moment for those examining Black communication related phenomena to harvest theories conceived and presented by Communication scholars actively engaged with pedagogy within the university system the world over.

seven traditions of communication theory: Models of Communication

Mats Bergman, Kęstas Kirtiklis, Johan Siebers, 2019-10-16 Models of Communication offers a timely reassessment of the significance of modelling in media and communication studies. From a rich variety of different perspectives, the collected essays explore the past, present, and future uses of communication models, in ordinary discourses concerning communication as well as in academic research. This book challenges received views of communication models and opens up new paths of inquiry for communication research. By zooming in on the manifestations and purposes of modelling in ordinary discourses on communication as well as in theoretical expositions, the essays collected in this volume cast new light on the problems and prospects of models crafted for the benefit of communication inquiry. Complementing earlier studies of models of communication, the volume digs deep into fundamental epistemological and ontological questions concerning modelling in the communication disciplines; but it also presents several novel models that promise to be of practical use in empirical studies of media and communication. The book is intended for communication scholars and students of media and will also be of interest for related disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences.

seven traditions of communication theory: Technological Innovations in Media and Communications

Dibyanshu Kumar, 2022-01-16 Technological Innovations in Media and Communications Media are the storage and transmission channels or tools used to store and deliver information or data. It is often referred to as synonymous with mass media or news media but may refer to a single medium used to communicate any data for any purpose. The word medium comes from the Latin word medius. The beginning of human communication through designed channels, i.e. not vocalization or gestures, dates back to ancient cave paintings, drawn maps, and writing. The Persian Empire (centered around present-day Iran and Afghanistan) played an important role in the field of communication. It devised what might be described as the first real mail or postal system, which is said to have been developed by the Persian emperor Cyrus the Great (c. 550 BC) after his conquest of Media. The role of the system as an intelligence-gathering apparatus is well documented, and the service was called *angariae*, a term that in time turned to indicate a tax system. The mass media are diversified media technologies that are intended to reach a large audience by mass communication. The technologies through which this communication takes place to vary. Broadcast media such as radio, recorded music, film and television transmit their information electronically. Print media use physical objects such as a newspaper, books, pamphlets or comics, to distribute their information. Outdoor media is a form of mass media that comprises billboards, signs, or placards placed inside and outside of commercial buildings, sports stadiums, shops and buses. Other outdoor media include flying billboards, blimps, and skywriting. The present book deals with all the important dimensions of this subject. It is a valuable reference source for all those concerned with this subject. Contents: • Uses and Gratifications of Mass Communication • Diffusion of Innovations in Mass Media • Media Audience Research and its Social Imaginaries • Communication Theory/Uses and Gratifications • Redefining Development Journalism • Democracy, Development, Peace and Communication • International Experience: Government Communication

and Media • Weblog and Emergent Democracy • Media and Community Development

seven traditions of communication theory: Decolonizing Communication Studies

Kehbuma Langmia, 2022-03-18 This volume examines the effects of the decolonization of communication studies. It shows that the discipline has undergone a rapid paradigm shift since the launching of the Ferment in the Field special edition of the Journal of Communication, in which scholars were called upon to rethink the field because of the crisis it was facing.

seven traditions of communication theory: The Ethics of Literary Communication Roger D. Sell, Adam Borch, Inna Lindgren, 2013-09-25 Viewing literature as one among other forms of communication, Roger D. Sell and his colleagues evaluate writer-respondent relationships according to the same ethical criterion as applies for dialogue of any other kind. In a nutshell: Are writers and readers respecting each other's human autonomy? If and when the answer here is "Yes!", Sell's team describe the communication that is going on as 'genuine'. In this latest book, they offer new illustrations of what they mean by this, and ask whether genuineness is compatible with communicational directness and communicational indirectness. Is there a risk, for instance, that a very direct manner of writing could be unacceptably coercive, or that a more indirect manner could be irresponsible, or positively deceitful? The book's overall conclusion is: "Not necessarily!" A directness which is truthful and stimulates free discussion does respect the integrity of the other person. And the same is true of an indirectness which encourages readers themselves to contribute to the construction and assessment of ideas, stories and experiences – sometimes literary indirectness may allow greater scope for genuineness than does the directness of a non-literary letter. By way of illustrating these points, the book opens up new lines of inquiry into a wide range of literary texts from Britain, Germany, France, Denmark, Poland, Romania, and the United States.

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