
Book review:

Crowley, D., & Mitchell, D. (1998). *Communication theory today*. London: Polity.

Reviewed by:
Joy Chia,
University of South Australia.

It is most important for the reader of this book to work through chapter 1 in detail as it succinctly presents theoretical perspectives of each of the chapters and guides the reader to the areas that are of interest or that may be important to further research on communication theory.

This is not a book for the casual reader, as the cultural studies approach, alongside social theory and communication theory, can at times present a rather heavy analysis and one that lacks practical application. Chapter 2, for example, addresses social theory and media and points to the place of face-to-face interaction and mediated interaction, with little reference to the Internet, websites and email that make up that mediated interaction. A more engaging discourse on electronic media occurs in chapter 3, including discussion of changing audiences online, changing social roles, and the challenges for new media online. This chapter presents an excellent synthesis of theory and practice, and if read in conjunction with Chapter 11 (which points to the place of social theory as part of converging media, media accountability, and the contribution of media to society and what this means), allows the reader to begin to grasp some of the dynamics and complexities of communication theory in a diverse society that aims for information equality. However,

embracing knowledge management amidst the overload of information that makes up the global, electronic world needs a focus on the social implications of this overload, not only a focus on the technology. This is one of the key points raised in chapter 12 which, like chapter 9, takes a global perspective and looks at the wider ramifications of the extended boundaries of new media.

Perhaps this book would have been better to confine its focus to global, online communities, with a social theory emphasis. Additional chapters such as Chapter 6, Risk Communication and Public Knowledge, and Chapter 4, A Recursive Theory of Communication, broaden theoretical perspectives but add little to the understanding of communication theory in contemporary society. The authors seemed to have crammed a great deal of very different theoretical discussion into one text but have not provided a good mix of interrelated chapters that builds into an overall picture of communication theory. The book should therefore be used mainly as a reference for specific research on theoretical perspectives in communication theory with a focus on the key chapters that have been mentioned above.
