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The Critique of Uncertainty Reduction

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The Critique of Uncertainty Reduction Theory

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Definition
Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) (Berger & Calabrese, 1975): A heuristic theory which states that individuals feel the need to reduce uncertainty in initial relationship interactions that occur face-to-face in order to feel comfortable about developing the relationships. This need to reduce uncertainty is influenced by three factors and seven variables:

Factors:
1. Anticipation of future interaction: Expectation that the relationship will continue
2. Deviance: Any behavior that is not normal
3. Incentive value: Perceived costs or rewards gained from the relationship

Variables:
1. Amount of communication: How much individuals verbally communicate
2. Nonverbal affiliative expressiveness: Nonverbal signals that communicate warmth
3. Information seeking: Engaging in strategies to discover information about others
4. Intimacy level of communication content: Amount of self-disclosure
5. Reciprocity: Sharing of information between individuals
6. Similarity: Shared cultural practices or beliefs
7. Liking: Feeling of attraction or favor

Context
Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC): Any communication that takes place through computers, such as email, social media, video conferencing, and chat rooms. Individuals use multiple strategies in reducing uncertainty online:

Strategies:
1. Interactive: Acquire information through direct interaction between individuals
2. Active: Acquire information without direct interaction between individuals
3. Extractive: Acquire information from written online comments of individual
4. Passive: Acquire information through unobtrusive observation of individual

Identified Weaknesses of URT:
1. Eurocentric:
   - URT was developed by two white males in the United States and was written to be applied to white subjects in Western societies
   
Implications:
- Reinforces the dominant practices and ideology of Western culture
- Devalues other cultures
- Disregards other ways of reducing uncertainty

2. Methods:
   - The majority of applications of URT have used quantitative methods of research

Implications:
- Produces generalizations which lead to stereotypes
- Does not provide intimacy or depth of information
- Disregards individuals’ personal experiences

3. Contexts:
   - URT was originally developed only to fit the context of initial interactions, face-to-face communication, and white U.S. culture

Implications:
- Results in other contexts may not be valid
- Reinforces the theory, but does not provide true insights into specific contexts

Suggestions for Future Research:
- URT needs to be studied intraculturally before interculturally
- Qualitative studies should be conducted in addition to quantitative studies
- Emic approaches should be taken before further etic testing

Works Cited: