

# Exploring the Role of Symbolic Convergence Theory in Enhancing Group Cohesiveness and Decision Making: A Systematic Literature Review Study

**2271**

Tiara Hana Pratiwi, Eva Martina Purba, Irwansyah Irwansyah  
Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

E-Mail: tiara.hana41@ui.ac.id, eva.martina31@ui.ac.id, irwansyah@ui.ac.id

Submitted:  
AUGUST 2024

Accepted:  
OCTOBER 2024

## ABSTRACT

Symbolic Convergence Theory describes group cohesiveness and decision-making influenced by symbolic convergence and rhetorical vision because they affect how group members understand and share common social values. This research aims to provide an overview of the implementation of Symbolic Convergence Theory in group communication, especially in cohesiveness and group decision-making. This research uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. This research systematically identifies and evaluates group cohesiveness and decision-making in several previous studies. However, along with the development of time and technology, direct and analog communication began to be less researched.

**Keywords:** Symbolic Convergence Theory, group, cohesiveness, decision-making

## INTRODUCTION

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) was first introduced by Ernest G. Bormann in the early 1970s as a framework for understanding how individuals in groups construct shared symbolic realities through dramatic communication (Bormann, 1972; Bormann, 1982). In the context of study group interaction, SCT plays an important role in explaining the process of forming rhetorical visions that arise from fantasies shared among group members (Olufowote, 2006; Bormann, 1996). Rhetorical visions can take the form of inside jokes or jargon (Bormann, 1985) that influence group cohesiveness (Henningsen, 2017). Furthermore, this process also influences how the group makes decisions together, especially when discussing to reach a collective decision. Over time, ideas or stories shared by one or more group members can form an agreement, which then becomes a collective decision. (Olufowote, 2006; Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 2001). Decision-making in groups is not always rational or linear, but is often shaped by symbolic dramatizations that reinforce group identity and shared goals (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997). In this context, SCT helps to explain how decisions made in group discussions are based not only on logical arguments, but also on symbolic realities that are co-constructed by group members (Horila, 2017; Bormann, 1994). This is particularly relevant in groups, where social and emotional dynamics play a large role in the discussion and decision-making process (Olufowote, 2006).

Basically, SCT emphasizes that communication in groups creates and maintains group consciousness through a dramatic process (Bormann, 1972; Bormann, 1973). This process is known as fantasy chaining, where a single dramatic message can trigger a chain reaction from group members, who then enrich or extend the message (Bormann, 1996). These chained fantasies form fantasy themes that contain shared values, emotions and motivations that unite the group (Horila, 2017; Bormann, 1982). In group discussions, this process helps to create collective agreement and shared understanding of the topic at hand (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997).

**JIMKES**

Jurnal Ilmiah Manajemen  
Kesatuan  
Vol. 12 No. 6, 2024  
pp. 2271 - 2284  
IBI Kesatuan  
ISSN 2337 - 7860  
E-ISSN 2721 - 169X  
DOI: 10.37641/jimkes.v12i6.2864

SCT provides important insights into how groups shape decisions through symbolic communication processes. Bormann (1985) explains that fantasies shared in groups allow group members to “meet at the same mind,” which creates a symbolic foundation for decision-making (Olufowote, 2006). When group members have a common outlook, they more easily reach agreement, as the outlook already unifies the group's beliefs, values and goals (Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 2001; Bormann, 1982). Therefore, SCT is not only relevant for understanding how decisions are made in groups, but also how group identity and purpose are formed through symbolic communication processes (Bormann, 1973; Horila 2017).

Various studies have been conducted to apply SCT in various group communication contexts, including in group decision-making. Bormann (1972) first used SCT to analyze communication processes in small groups, especially in the context of decision-making (Bormann, 1972). He found that group fantasies could create consensus through the dissemination and enrichment of shared dramatic messages (Olufowote, 2006). The study was later extended to other contexts, including organizational communication and intercultural communication (Bormann, 1982). Another relevant study was conducted by Olufowote (2006), who examined how shared fantasies in groups can shape collective action. In this context, chained fantasies help to create a shared consciousness that underlies group action, including decision-making. This research suggests that SCT provides a powerful framework for understanding the dynamics of group decision-making, especially in situations where decisions are based on symbolic agreement rather than just rational logic (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997).

To strengthen the theoretical basis for this study, several important sources from group literature and communication theory have contributed to a deeper understanding of the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory in study group interaction. Frey, Gouran, and Poole (1999) emphasize the importance of communication in group decision-making, where interaction dynamics and dramatization become the foundation for achieving group consensus. They also state that group interaction is a complex process, involving both verbal and non-verbal communication that influences decision outcomes. In addition, Poole (2008) outlines how decisions in organizations and groups are often influenced by social constructions formed through communication during the decision-making process. This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding how symbolic communication shapes a group's frame of mind which is then used to make collective decisions.

Furthermore, Donsbach's (2015) encyclopedia of communication highlights the role of communication in group structures and processes, where decisions are made not only based on rational logic, but also through social dynamics involving symbolism and interaction. This understanding helps link symbolic convergence theory to practical aspects of group communication that can be used to improve the quality of decision-making.

The references used in this research reflect the importance of communication in shaping group decisions and suggest that group decisions are never fully rational, but rather are often shaped by the social and symbolic context that exists within group interactions (Frey, Gouran, & Poole, 1999; Donsbach, 2015; Poole, 2008).

This research aims to review the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory in the context of study group interactions, with a particular focus on how this theory explains collective decision-making processes in group discussions (Bormann, 1972; Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 2001) qualitatively using a systematic review of the literature. Through this literature review, this research hopes to provide new insights into how symbolic communication influences group decision-making dynamics, as well as how shared fantasies help shape consensus in learning groups (Olufowote, 2006; Horila, 2017).

This research also seeks to explore the role of rhetorical visions in shaping group consciousness and how this process can be applied in collaborative learning contexts. By analyzing the existing literature, this research will identify key themes that emerge from

the application of SCT in group discussions, as well as identify research gaps that can be further explored (Bormann, 1994; Bormann, 2001).

This systematic review will involve an analysis of the literature relevant to the application of SCT in the context of learning groups. The main focus will be on studies that examine collective decision-making in groups and how SCT can be used to explain such dynamics (Bormann, 1982) within the scope of direct communication and analog communication. The analysis will include empirical and theoretical studies that have been published in leading journals in the field of communication, as well as theoretical studies relevant to this research topic (Horila, 2017).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Symbolic Convergence Theory***

Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) was first introduced by Ernest G. Bormann in the early 1970s as a framework for understanding how individuals in groups construct shared symbolic realities through dramatic communication (Bormann, 1972; Bormann, 1982). In the context of learning group interaction, SCT plays an important role in explaining the process of forming rhetorical visions that arise from fantasies shared among group members (Olufowote, 2006; Bormann, 1996). This process influences how groups make decisions together, especially in discussions that involve collective decision-making. Over time, fantasies shared by one or more group members can form consensus, which then translates into collective decisions (Olufowote, 2006; Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 2001).

Decision-making in learning groups is not always rational or linear, but is often shaped by symbolic dramatizations that reinforce group identity and shared goals (Bormann, Knutson & Musolf, 1997). In this context, SCT helps explain how decisions made in group discussions are based not only on logical arguments, but also on symbolic realities co-constructed by group members (Horila, 2017; Bormann, 1994). This is particularly relevant in learning groups, where social and emotional dynamics play a large role in the discussion and decision-making process (Olufowote, 2006).

Essentially, SCT emphasizes that communication in groups creates and maintains group consciousness through a dramatic process (Bormann, 1972; Bormann, 1973). This process is known as fantasy chaining, where a single dramatic message can trigger a chain reaction from group members, who then enrich or extend the message (Bormann, 1996). These chained fantasies form fantasy themes that contain shared values, emotions and motivations that unite the group (Horila, 2017; Bormann, 1982). In study group discussions, this process helps to create collective agreement and shared understanding of the topic at hand (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997). SCT provides important insights into how groups learn to shape decisions through the process of symbolic communication. Bormann (1985) explains that fantasies shared in groups allow group members to “meet at the same mind,” which creates a symbolic foundation for decision-making (Olufowote, 2006). When group members share a common vision, they are more likely to reach consensus in decision-making, as the rhetorical vision has integrated the group's beliefs, values and goals (Bormann, Cragan & Shields, 2001; Bormann, 1982). Therefore, SCT is not only relevant for understanding how decisions are made in groups, but also how group identities and goals are formed through symbolic communication processes (Bormann, 1973; Horila, 2017).

Various studies have been conducted to apply SCT in various group communication contexts, including in group decision-making. Bormann (1972) first used SCT to analyze communication processes in small groups, especially in the context of decision-making (Bormann, 1972). He found that group fantasy can create consensus through the dissemination and enrichment of shared dramatic messages (Olufowote, 2006).

Another relevant study was conducted by Olufowote (2006), who examined how fantasies shared in groups can shape collective action. In this context, chained fantasies help create a shared consciousness that underpins group action, including decision-

making. This research suggests that SCT provides a powerful framework for understanding the dynamics of group decision-making, especially in situations where decisions are based on symbolic agreement, not just rational logic (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997).

To strengthen the theoretical basis for this study, several important sources from group literature and communication theory have contributed to a deeper understanding of the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory in group interaction. Frey, Gouran, and Poole (1999) emphasize the importance of communication in group decision-making, where interaction dynamics and dramatization are the foundation for achieving group consensus. They also state that group interaction is a complex process, involving both verbal and non-verbal communication that influences decision outcomes. In addition, Poole (2008) outlines how decisions in organizations and groups are often influenced by social constructions formed through communication during the decision-making process. This perspective is particularly relevant in understanding how symbolic communication shapes a group's frame of mind which is then used to make collective decisions.

Furthermore, the encyclopedia of communication by Donsbach (2015) highlights the role of communication in group structures and processes, where decisions are made not only based on rational logic, but also through social dynamics involving symbolism and interaction. This understanding helps link symbolic convergence theory to practical aspects of group communication that can be used to improve the quality of decision-making.

The references used in this study reflect the importance of communication in shaping group decisions and show that group decisions are never fully rational, but are often shaped by the social and symbolic context that exists in group interactions (Frey, Gouran, & Poole, 1999; Donsbach, 2015; Poole, 2008).

#### **Symbolic Convergence Theory and Cohesiveness**

Cohesiveness in groups is an important element that brings members together and maintains unity in the group. Forsyth (1990, 1999) describes cohesiveness as the "glue" that binds group members and provides the strength to keep the group together. This cohesiveness is reflected in the cooperation, satisfaction, and sense of fun among group members. Factors that influence cohesiveness include the frequency and quality of interaction between members. The more often group members interact and build close communication, the greater their level of interest in the group, which in turn strengthens the cohesiveness (Knight, Pearson, & Hunsinger, 2008).

In the context of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT), group cohesiveness can also be analyzed through symbolic interactions that occur within the group. Bormann (1985) explains that groups will share a serial fantasy theme before the group begins to assign responsibility, praise, or blame, as well as evoke guilt, hatred, and love. These serial fantasy themes often take the form of creative and imaginative ideas, which are sometimes unrealistic, but play an important role in building emotional cohesiveness in the group. Osborn (1957) emphasized that imaginative language triggers the formation of such fantasy theme chains. In addition, Henningsen (2017) argues that the more ideas a group freely generates, the more likely the fantasy chain process is to emerge, which will strengthen group cohesiveness.

When groups reach symbolic convergence, group members begin to show emotional investment and commitment through sympathy, empathy, and identification with each other (Bormann, 1982). Symbolic Convergence Theory can thus be used to analyze the processes that lead to cohesiveness in groups, where the fantasy theme chain serves as a mechanism that reflects both internal and external group dynamics. Bale (as cited in Bormann, 1982) states that these fantasy themes are often a reflection of the problems and challenges facing the group at the time. Thus, through SCT, we can understand how group cohesiveness is formed and maintained through symbolic interactions that strengthen shared identity and group solidarity.

### ***Symbolic Convergence Theory and Group Discussion***

In groups, decisions taken together are very important to achieve group goals. Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) explains how group members share stories or narratives, which then create a shared awareness or understanding within the group (Bormann, 1985; Bormann, Knutson & Musolf, 1997). In the decision-making process, these shared narratives and symbols can influence how group members view problems and seek solutions (Olufowote, 2006; Horila, 2017).

Theories on group decision-making also point to the importance of communication and collaboration to reach rational and mutually agreed decisions (Horila, 2017; Poole, 2008). By combining these two approaches, we can analyze how groups learn to share symbols and information to make decisions together (Horila, 2017).

SCT describes how group members create themes or stories that, through communication, turn into a shared vision (Bormann, 1985; Hossain et al., 2018). In groups, this process usually begins when members share stories or experiences about the issue or concept they are discussing. These stories build an emotional connection among members, which then creates a sense of community (Bormann, 1985).

Group decision-making theory suggests that open discussion and collaboration are essential to reach good decisions. The process usually involves several stages, such as sharing information, analyzing the problem, evaluating options, and reaching an agreement (Poole, 2008). During this process, the interaction between group members and the vision they share greatly influences the outcome of the decision.

SCT helps explain how group members can share symbolic meanings during discussions, which then influence their decisions. A shared story or vision can help the group focus on the goal and agree on a solution that is acceptable to all parties (Zanin, Hoelscher, & Kramer, 2016; Bormann, 1985).

According to Bormann (1985), fantasies shared within the group serve to create a shared consciousness, which can be the basis for decision-making. These fantasies provide a symbolic context that helps the group prioritize, find solutions, and reach agreement (Bormann, 1985; Bormann, Knutson & Musolf, 1997). Strong fantasies that are agreed upon by all members can reduce conflict, as members tend to accept decisions that are in line with the vision they share (Bormann, 1985).

Combining SCT and group decision-making theory provides an effective way to understand how learning groups can reach shared decisions. By focusing on symbols and stories in group communication, SCT helps us see decision-making as a process that is not only rational, but also symbolic and influenced by emotions (Bormann, 1985; Horila, 2017).

This theoretical framework can be used for further research on how learning groups interact and make decisions, and how shared stories can influence the decision-making process (Bormann, Knutson & Musolf, 1997; Poole, 2008).

## **RESEARCH**

### **Research Method**

This research was conducted qualitatively through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify and analyze the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in the context of cohesiveness and shared decision-making in group discussions. SLR was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the research topic, as well as ensuring transparent and replicable results (Horila, 2017; Hossain et al., 2018).

The initial stage of this study was to determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria for literature selection. The included literature should be relevant to the topics of SCT, study group interaction, cohesiveness, and decision-making. Previous research on symbolic communication, fantasy theme analysis, cohesiveness and group decisions will be the main focus. Articles published in peer-reviewed journals and books relevant to the topic of SCT are the main sources in this research (Olufowote, 2006; Zanin, Hoelscher & Kramer, 2016).

Data collection was conducted using several academic databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, Sage Publications and Taylor and Francis. Afterwards, relevant articles were extracted and analyzed using Fantasy Theme Analysis (FTA). FTA allows researchers to identify patterns of symbolic communication that shape fantasy themes and rhetorical visions in group cohesiveness and decision-making processes (Olufowote, 2006; Zanin, Hoelscher & Kramer, 2016).

Subsequently, each selected article is qualitatively analyzed to understand how the fantasy themes generated in group interactions influence cohesiveness and collective decision-making processes. This research will also analyze how serial fantasies and dramatic messages influence the formation of cohesiveness, group consensus, and collective decisions (Halvorsen, & Sarangi, 2015; Horila, 2017).

This research is expected to identify communication patterns that create and strengthen collective consciousness in groups, which in turn shapes cohesiveness and collective decisions. Using the SCT framework, this research provides insight into the dynamics of symbolic communication in group cohesiveness and decision-making (Olufowote, 2006; Zanin, Hoelscher & Kramer, 2016; Hossain et al., 2018).

To ensure the robustness and maintain the clarity of the evaluation procedure, this study will use the recommendations established by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). PRISMA guidelines consist of four fundamental phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion criteria for journals consistent with the research topic (Page et al. 2021). The research will adhere to standards to improve the clarity and reliability of the review, establish a methodologically solid basis for integrating and evaluating the pertinent literature on the topic. The use of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method and Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) criteria demonstrates a commitment to a thorough and structured approach, making this research project academically sound.

#### **Data Criteria**

Scientific journals that have met the criteria are written in English and Indonesian. English journals are from Scopus, Sagepub, and Taylor and Francis. The search approach was carried out by conducting searches on search engines using predetermined phrases, such as “Symbolic Convergence Theory” and “group communication” for English journals and “Symbolic Convergence Theory” and “group communication” for Indonesian journals. The findings were then systematically organized to identify publications that were relevant to the specific criteria of this study. Phrases used in searching for relevant research included “symbolic convergence theory”, “group”, “group communication”, “group”, and “group communication” to facilitate a thorough examination of relevant scientific journals within the defined research framework.

#### **Data Collection Technique**

Data collection techniques included a thorough search and deliberate selection of scientific publications from various well-verified online databases, including Scopus, Sage publications, Taylor & Francis (for international publications), and local scientific publications indexed by SINTA 2, within a predetermined period of 2000 to 2024.

The journal search process prioritized scientific journals that meet international and SINTA standards, used certain keywords, and imposed time limits. The application of this methodology resulted in the identification of a pool of 84 scientific journals. Next, a systematic and careful selection process was carried out by focusing on the relevance of the journals based on the research subject matter. As a result, 10 journals were identified for further comprehensive examination. The theoretical analysis conducted in this study will be based on the selection of 10 journals. These journals had been carefully selected to provide a focused and complete review of the relevant scientific literature within the specified timeframe and the chosen research topic.

#### **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Journal search results using Systematic Literature Review (SLR) were classified based on several criteria, including year of publication, geographical location of the research, academic discipline, research methodology used, and research findings in the

journal. The structured analysis facilitated a thorough understanding of the various aspects of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) that occurred when a group made a collective decision. By placing the data from the 10 selected journals into clear categories, clear patterns emerged to assist in understanding that there were many different parts of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in group communication studies. This systematic method guaranteed an overall view of the topic and made it easier for the research to find common patterns and trends in the academic literature on Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) and how it applied to a group's experience of cohesiveness and group decision-making.

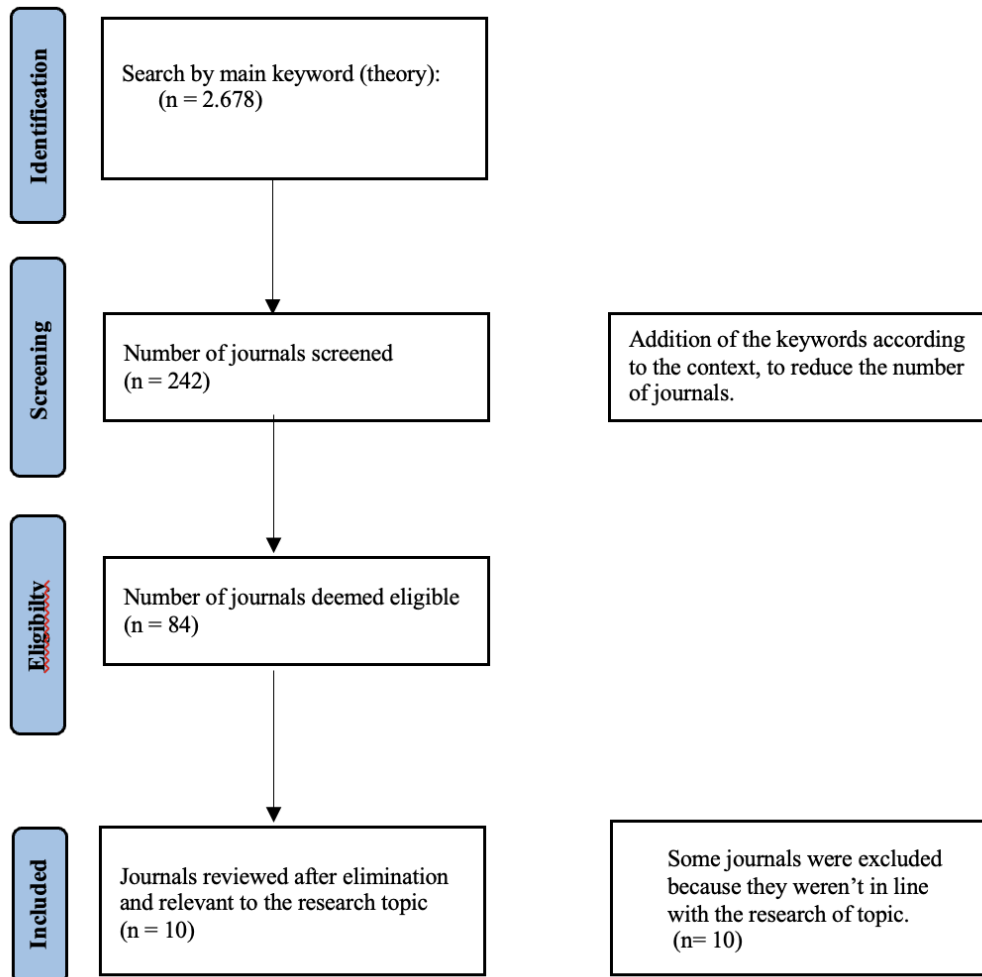


Figure 1. Bagan PRISMA

Table 1. List of Selected Scientific Journals

No.	Journal	Year of Publication	Author	Research Method
1.	COMMUNICATION AS AN AID TO RESOCIALIZATION A Case Study of a Men's Anger Group	2000	LARRY J. WHATULE	Qualitative
2.	Team decision-making in workplace meetings: The interplay of activity roles and discourse roles	2015	Kristin Halvorsen, Srikant Sarangi	Qualitative
3.	A message-focused measurement	2016	Adam	Qualitative and

	of the communication dimension of social capital: Revealing shared meaning in a network of relationships			Quantitative
4.	Extending Symbolic Convergence Theory: A Shared Identity Perspective of a Team's Culture	2016	Alaina C. Zanin	Qualitative
5.	SEMPER FIDELIS: SOME VALUES OF THE MARINE RETIREE GROUP	2016	Virienia Puspita	Qualitative
6.	Does Brainstorming Promote Cohesiveness? How the Rules of Brainstorming Mirror Symbolic Convergence	2017	David Dryden Henningsen & Mary Lynn	Quantitative
7.	Contents and Functions of Dramatizations in Team Decision Making	2017	Tessa Horila	Qualitative
8.	We are who we say we are: teachers' shared identity in the workplace	2018	Britney Gilmore & Michael W. Kramer	Qualitative
9.	VB Strong: how local news stations created a platform for a community to mourn victims of a mass shooting	2021	Christine McWhorter	Qualitative
10.	Meaning of Pluralism for Indonesian Immigrant Workers in Malaysia	2023	Ilham Prisgunanto, Iswahyu Prana Wukir	Qualitative

Category of Journal Publication Year

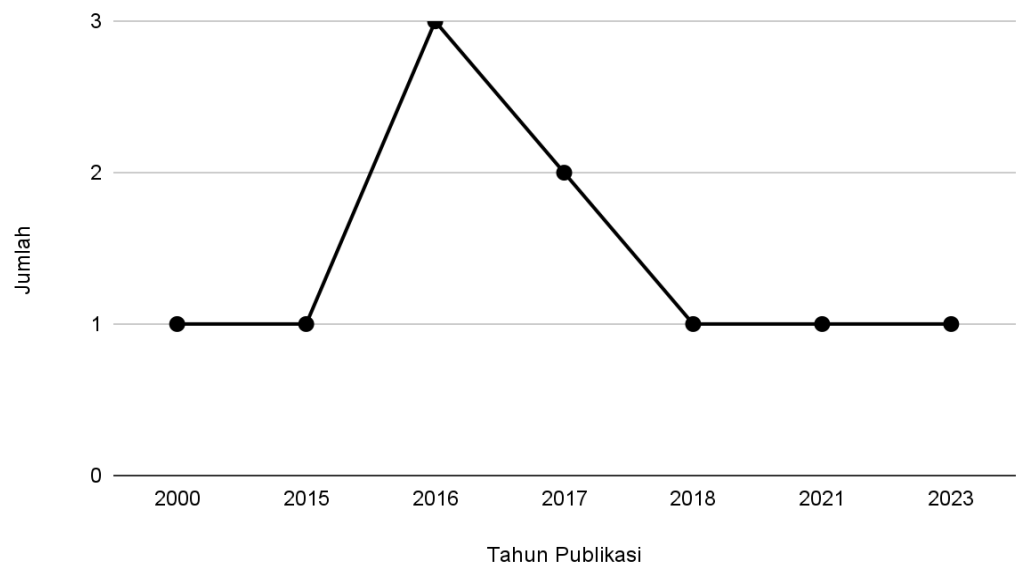


Figure 2. Graph of Journal Publication Year

After examining the publication years of the selected scientific journals, the study found a pattern. 2016 stood out as the year with the most journal publications. In that

year, there were three scientific journals published or 30% of the total journals included in the analysis. Then, in 2017, there were two scientific journal publications or 20% of the total data available. In contrast, the years 2000, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2021, and 2023 showed the lowest level of representation, with only one journal each, representing about 10% of the total. The examination of publication years provided valuable insights into the time course of research on the implementation of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in group cohesiveness and decision-making and highlights the growing scientific contributions on this topic over the analyzed period.

### Category of Research Location

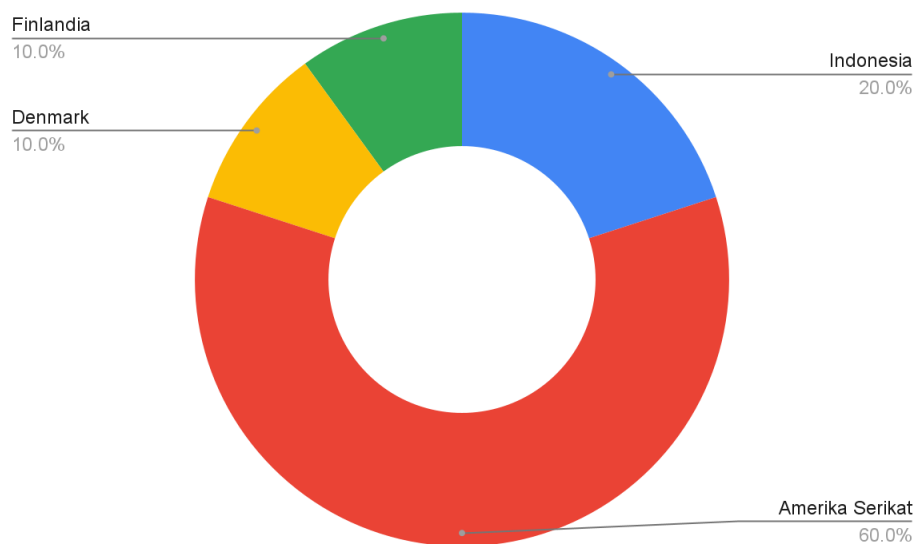


Figure 3. Diagram of Research Location

When examining the geographical distribution of research in the selected publications, the study should observe the prevalence of research originating from different countries. The most frequently published research location is the United States, collectively accounting for six journals, which account for 60% of the entire data set. Indonesia came in second place. Two scientific journal publications were published, accounting for about 20% of the total data set. Furthermore, Finland and Denmark also made significant contributions. Each country published one scientific journal publication, which collectively made up 10% of the entire distribution. The presence of multiple geographical locations highlighted the worldwide scope of studies on the implementation of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in group cohesiveness and decision-making, thus providing a variety of perspectives coming from different cultural and societal contexts. A comprehensive analysis of the disciplinary allocation among the selected journals reveals that the journals came from a wide range of academic fields. The field of communication science contributed seven journals, which accounted for a significant proportion of 70% of the total. This percentage indicated the important role of the communication discipline in examining the implementation of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in group cohesiveness and decision-making. Business, social science and education disciplines had similar levels of academic interest, with one journal published across all disciplines or 10% each. The diverse disciplinary representation in this study demonstrated the multidisciplinary character of research on the implementation of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in group cohesiveness and decision-making, but also underscored the range of academic perspectives that scholars use to investigate group experiences with this theory.

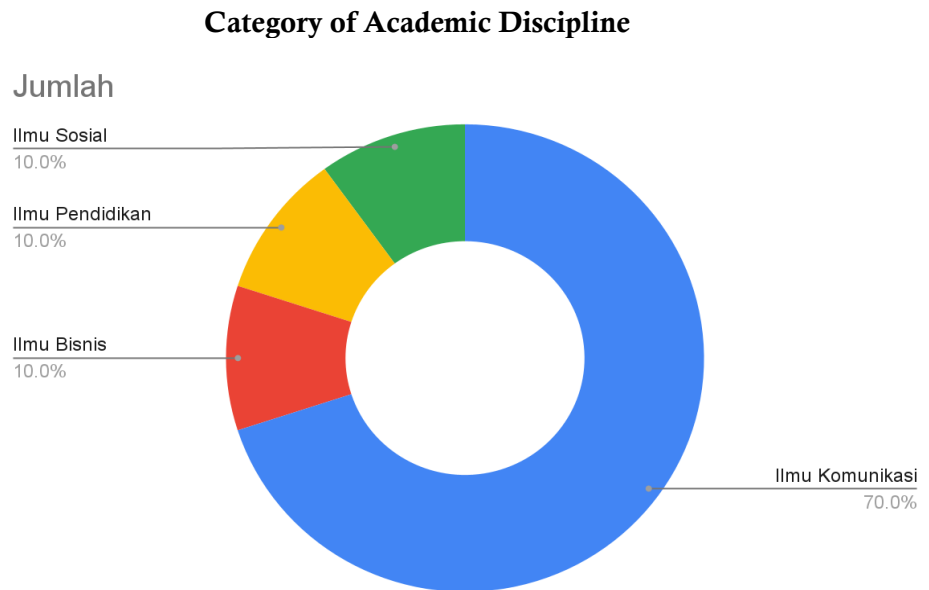


Figure 4. Diagram of Academic Discipline

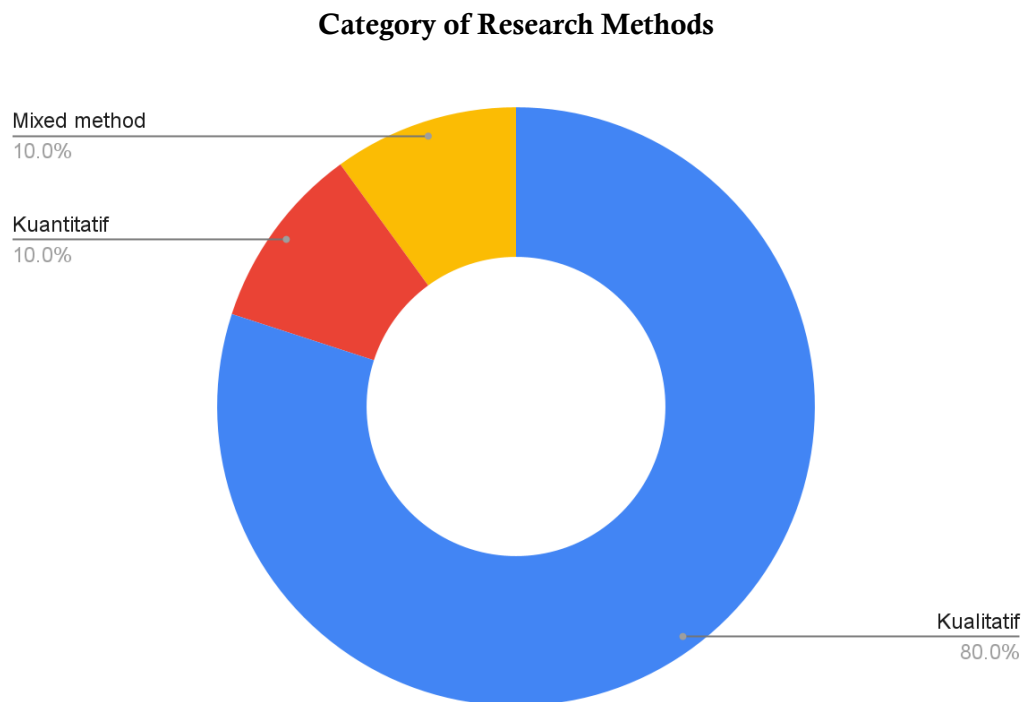


Figure 5. Diagram of Research Methods

The journals selected showed significant variation in the research approaches applied. There were three classifications for the research methods category, namely qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative methodology dominated, covering eight academic journals or 80% of the overall data. The selection of this methodology carried out interviews, observations, and content analysis to comprehensively examine the topic under discussion. Quantitative and mixed methods analysis were used in one study each or 10% of the data. Quantitative research conducted surveys in the selected journal studies. The presence of multiple methodologies shows the various approaches that have been used by academics in researching the implementation of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in group cohesiveness and decision-making.

## **DISCUSSION**

This research aims to explore the role of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in enhancing group cohesiveness and decision-making, based on a systematic literature review. The results of this study show that SCT is highly relevant in various contexts, especially in the development of group dynamics through deep symbolic communication processes. In the context of professionally formed work groups or teams, SCT provides a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how group members construct shared meaning through recurring stories, dramatizations and fantasies. Through these mechanisms, SCT creates a solid group identity and enables stronger cohesion among group members.

Based on the literature review, SCT has been shown to increase group cohesiveness through the formation of fantasy themes and a collectively constructed rhetorical vision (Gilmore & Kramer, 2018; McWhorter, 2021; Zanin et al., 2016). The process of “fantasy chaining” or story linkage between group members allows for the development of shared themes that automatically increase the sense of belonging to the group. Zanin et al. (2016) found groups that are able to collectively build a rhetorical vision through the SCT process are more cohesive, which in turn strengthens group cohesiveness and solidarity. Puspita (2016) further explained that fantasy themes and rhetorical visions created a sense of drama and bring members together. Stories helped the group create a change of state from non-cohesive to cohesive.

In addition to increasing cohesiveness, SCT also plays an important role in group decision-making. This study showed that the process of dramatizing messages and chaining themes, which is an integral part of SCT, helped the group to form a symbolic reality that became a reference in decision-making (Horila, 2017; Saffer, 2016). Horila (2017) emphasized that dramatizing messages helps in legitimizing the decisions taken, as well as reinforcing previous decisions.

In the context of decision-making, SCT helps groups to craft a shared vision that reinforces a more inclusive and reflective decision-making process. This allows groups to negotiate meaning and form stronger consensus in making strategic decisions. This research found that in groups with conflicting rhetorical visions, there were barriers to decision-making, but with SCT, these conflicts could be overcome through consensus building based on shared symbolization (Hossain et al., 2018; Whatule, 2000).

In addition to internal group factors, the social and cultural environment also has a significant influence on the application of SCT in groups. This influence can be seen in how group members understand and share shared social values. Hossain et al. (2018) found that social values communicated symbolically through group narratives and dramatizations are critical in shaping collective meaning and directing strategic decisions. Then, Prisgunanto and Wukir (2023) found that the rhetorical vision of cultural differences and customs in the environment of the group's existence made members reach a consensus to understand the culture and customs of the environment. The rhetorical vision became a picture in the minds of group members that motivates them to work better. The rhetorical vision could be dynamic and evolve according to group interactions.

In culturally diverse groups, SCT plays an important role in creating identity unity through the process of symbolic convergence. This process allows group members from different backgrounds to share stories and experiences, ultimately forming a deeper understanding of the group's overall identity (Gilmore & Kramer, 2018; Saffer, 2016).

Research from Henningsen (2017) supports this study's concept that cohesiveness and group decision-making are related to Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT). The findings showed that brainstorming in groups can create conditions similar to the fantasy chaining process, where group members share imagined ideas and then build upon each other's ideas. Focusing on quantity, the study found a positive relationship between SCT and cohesiveness. This is because there is an increased likelihood of ideas resonating with multiple group members. Furthermore, this finding is relevant in the context of decision-making, where SCT allows the group to create symbolizations that guide the collective decision-making process.

While SCT can strengthen group cohesion, if not managed well, excessive cohesion can actually reduce the group's effectiveness in decision-making due to reduced critical thinking and a tendency to maintain unity over decision quality.

As Horila (2017) points out, conditions where group cohesiveness is too high lead to a loss of critical thinking and rational decision-making. When group members are too focused on harmony and unity, they tend to avoid conflict or dissent, which can ultimately hinder the emergence of creative ideas and innovative solutions.

One of the main factors at play is an overly dominant rhetorical vision, where the group's vision or narrative is too strong and accepted without critical evaluation. This leads to group members simply following the existing narrative without questioning its relevance or validity, resulting in decisions that tend to be homogeneous and lack consideration of different viewpoints (Zanin et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2018). In this situation, the fantasy chaining process can actually create the illusion of agreement, where each member feels that the majority view is the most correct, even though there may be other better options.

Furthermore, Hossain et al. (2018) showed that when a group is highly cohesive, there is a tendency for members to ignore external signals or information that might disrupt the accepted narrative of the group. This results in decisions being less flexible and unresponsive to environmental changes or new challenges.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This journal examines the application of Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) in improving group cohesiveness and decision-making based on a systematic literature review. SCT proved to be a highly relevant theoretical framework in understanding how groups construct shared meaning through dramatic processes, such as shared stories, serial fantasies, and rhetorical visions. The group cohesion created through these processes facilitates more inclusive and reflective decision-making, as all members can contribute to the process of creating shared symbolic meaning.

The results showed that group cohesiveness increased with the formation of a collective rhetorical vision and the development of a fantasy theme. This process allows group members to share a common understanding and build solidarity through shared symbolization (Journal SCT-2). However, excessive cohesiveness can also decrease the effectiveness of decision-making when critical thinking is reduced, as members are more likely to avoid conflict or dissent, and this leads to suboptimal decision-making.

The research also highlights that the social and cultural environment plays an important role in the application of SCT. In culturally diverse groups, SCT can help create unity of identity and a dynamic rhetorical vision, which can motivate group members to perform better and face challenges together.

Overall, this research confirms the importance of SCT in strengthening group dynamics and guiding better decision-making processes, but cautions against risks such as groupthink that can arise from excessive cohesiveness.

However, there are some criticisms of SCT. The theory is less explored in current small group communication research, as it is more widely applied in organizational communication. In addition, there is limited literature discussing the implementation of SCT in the context of direct and analog communication, while most studies focus on computer-based communication (CMC). In the context of multicultural groups, SCT is highly relevant for building a shared identity, but if cohesion is too high, it can reduce critical thinking.

This research recommends further studies on the application of SCT in direct and analog communication, and the importance of exploring the link between group cohesiveness and decision-making using this theory.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bormann, E. G. (1972). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 58(4), 396-407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637209383138>
- [2] Bormann, E. G. (1973). The Eagleton affair: A fantasy theme analysis. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 59(2), 143-159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00335637309383163>
- [3] Bormann, E. G. (1982). The symbolic convergence theory of communication: Applications and implications for teachers and consultants. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 10(1), 50-61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00909888209365212>
- [4] Bormann, E. G. (1985). Symbolic convergence theory: A communication formulation. *Journal of Communication*, 35(4), 128-138. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1985.tb02977.x>
- [5] Bormann, E. G. (1994). Response to "revitalizing the study of small group communication". *Communication Studies*, 45(1), 86-91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979409368411>
- [6] Bormann, E. G., Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (1996). An expansion of the rhetorical vision component of the symbolic convergence theory: The cold war paradigm case. *Communication Monographs*, 63(1), 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759609376371>
- [7] Bormann, E. G., Knutson, R. L., & Musolf, K. (1997). Why do people share fantasies? An empirical investigation of a basic tenet of the symbolic convergence communication theory. *Communication Studies*, 48(3), 254-276. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10510979709368504>
- [8] Bormann, E. G., Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (2001). Three decades of developing, grounding, and using symbolic convergence theory (SCT). *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 25(1), 271-313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2001.11679006>
- [9] Halvorsen, K., & Sarangi, S. (2015). Team decision-making in workplace meetings: The interplay of activity roles and discourse roles. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 76, 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2014.11.002>
- [10] Horila, T. (2017). Contents and functions of dramatizations in team decision making. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 1-28. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488417743983>
- [11] Hossain, M., Islam, M. T., Momin, M. A., Nahar, S., & Alam, M. S. (2018). Understanding communication of sustainability reporting: Application of symbolic convergence theory (SCT). *Journal of Business Ethics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3874-6>
- [12] Olufowote, J. O. (2006). Rousing and redirecting a sleeping giant: Symbolic convergence theory and complexities in the communicative constitution of collective action. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19(3), 451-492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318905280326>
- [13] Henningsen, D. D., & Henningsen, M. L. M. (2017). Does brainstorming promote cohesiveness? How the rules of brainstorming mirror symbolic convergence. *Communication Reports*, 30(1), 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2017.1394476>
- [14] Knight, M. B., Pearson, J. M., & Hunsinger, D. S. (2008). The role of media richness in information technology-supported communication in group cohesion, agreeability, and performance. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing*, 20(4), 23-44. <https://doi.org/10.4018/joeuc.2008100102>

- [15] McWhorter, C. (2021). VB strong: How local news stations created a platform for a community to mourn victims of a mass shooting. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2021.1891900>
- [16] Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., ... Moher, D. (2021, March 29). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *The BMJ*, 372(71). <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
- [17] Poole, M. S., & Ahmed, I. (2008). Decision-making processes in organizations. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication*. Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecd007>
- [18] Saffer, A. J. (2016). A message-focused measurement of the communication dimension of social capital: Revealing shared meaning in a network of relationships. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 28(3-4), 170–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1062726X.2016.1228065>
- [19] Sheldon, Z. (2020). The limits of faith-based organizations: Lessons from a big idea. *Communication Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2020.1749684>
- [20] Zanin, A. C., Hoelscher, C. S., & Kramer, M. W. (2016). Extending symbolic convergence theory: A shared identity perspective of a team's culture. *Small Group Research*, 47(4), 438–472. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496416658554>