The Encoding/decoding model of communication was first developed by cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall in 1973. He discussed this model of communication in an essay entitled 'Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse.' Hall's essay offers a theoretical approach of how media messages are produced, disseminated, and interpreted. His model claims that TV and other media audiences are presented with messages that are decoded, or interpreted in different ways depending on an individual's cultural background, economic standing, and personal experiences. This work of Hall’s brought a revolution in mass media research on communication. The earlier research was dogged by the traditional communication circuit, which recognized only two stages; Receiver-stage MESSAGE

2Sender-stage 1

This model of communication was very much linear, where the message flowed from one side to the other; from sender to receiver. Hall identified a complex structure involved in message production and its reception. The traditional communication theory took the audience for granted. It considered the audience as
passive. But Stuart Hall brought to notice the active role of audience by focusing upon the complex process of Encoding and Decoding.

**Four-stage Communication Model**

In his essay Hall proposed four stage theory of communication in which he identified the following stages; Production, Circulation, Use (consumption) and Reproduction.

- **Production** – This is where the encoding of a message takes place. By drawing upon society's dominant ideologies, the creator of the message is feeding off of society's beliefs, and values.
- **Circulation** – The subtle manner in which a message is transmitted. How things are circulated, influences how audience members will receive the message and put it to use.
- **Use (consumption/understanding)** – This is the decoding/interpreting of a message which requires active recipients. This is a complex process of understanding for the audience.
- **Reproduction** – This is the stage after audience members have interpreted the message in their own way based on their experiences and beliefs. What is the reaction after consuming the message is the stage of reproduction.

Hall says each of these stages is ‘relatively Autonomous’ from the other. He meant to say that each of these steps is autonomous at the same time logically interdependent in the chain. According to him each stage has its own determining limits and possibilities. Hall says there is no random interpretation at any stage, because each stage limits the possibilities in the next. Hall perceived a ‘complex structure of dominance’ in messages. This structure of dominance varies at each stage.
First, the institutional structures of broadcasting, with their practices and networks of production, their organized relations and technical infrastructures, are required to produce a programme. Production, here, constructs the message. Thus the circuit begins here. The production process has its 'discursive' aspect: it moulds the message in a presentable form.

Further the production structures draw the message from the other discursive formations created by wider socio-cultural and political power structures (language/dominant culture/ideology etc.). After drawing on these discursive formations/ available knowledge in society, the message is ideologically circulated, in a presentable and acceptable manner.

At the stage of production, message is appropriated as per the technical needs and at the stage of Circulation it is appropriated as per the socio-economic and language power relations. The message is given a presentable shape; a ‘message form’. The message form becomes the vehicle of the intended message. Before it is put to use/consumption, the message is appropriated as a meaningful discourse so that it is meaningfully decoded. At the stage of ‘Use’ the audience can decode the message as per their socio-economic and political background. The audience might have differing socio-economic and political background. As the background differs the decoding also differs. It is this set of decoded meanings which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioural consequences.

Programme
as meaningful discourse


\[\text{Encoding} \quad \text{Decoding}\]
\[
\begin{array}{ll}
\text{Meaning} & \text{Meaning} \\
\text{Structures 1} & \text{Structures 2}
\end{array}
\]

Framework of knowledge

Framework of knowledge
In a 'determinate' moment the power relations encode a massage: at another
determinate moment the 'message', via its decodings comes into social practice and
acquires social use value or political effectivity. As the message is discursively
produced, circulated and used/consumed, there arise 'Distortions' or
'misunderstandings'. As the encoded message is not decoded in a desired way,
there is a kind of non-identity or lack of equivalence between encoding and
decoding. At both the ends message is produced differently; at one end producers
create a message at another reader/audience creates a meaning. Thus encoding and
decoding both are creative moments. According to Stuart Hall reader/audience is
also equally important.

Here Hall identifies three positions from where the audience/reader might decode
the message.
- Dominant position:
- Negotiated position
- Oppositional position

**Dominant/hegemonic position:**

This position is one where the consumer takes the actual meaning directly, and
decodes it exactly the way it was encoded. The consumer operates within the
dominant point of view, and fully shares the codes of the text and accepts and
reproduces the intended meaning. Here, there is barely any misunderstanding
because both the sender and receiver have the same cultural biases. This is the
ideal-typical case of 'perfectly transparent communication'

**Negotiated position:**
This position is a mixture of accepting and rejecting elements; as Hall states, “decoding within the negotiated version contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements…”. Readers acknowledge the dominant message, but do not accept everything the way the encoder intended. The reader to a certain extent shares the text codes and generally accepts the preferred meaning, but simultaneously also resists and modifies the message in a way which reflects his/her own experiences and interests. Negotiated codes operate through what we might call particular or situated logics.

To explain it, Hall gives example of a workers response/reading to Industrial Relations Bill which intended to limit the right to strike or to argue for a wages freeze; a worker may have a negotiated reading here; considering the 'national interest' and economic debate, the decoder may adopt the hegemonic definition, may agree for less payment, but at the same time may oppose the stern stand of the govt. to curtail their freedom to go on strike for better pay and conditions.

**Oppositional position:**

In this position a consumer understands the literal meaning, but due to different backgrounds each individual has his own way of decoding messages, while forming his own interpretations gets exactly the opposite of the intended meaning. Here continuing with the same example of Industrial Relations Bill: a group may take opposite stand and may read every mention of the 'national interests as 'class interest'. He/she is operating with what we must call an oppositional code.

The reader/veiwer detotalizes the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference.

Hall says reality exists outside the language due to this fact; there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. Iconic signs/visual signs are also coded signs. Association between the image and the meaning is not natural it is the part of convention. But this convention achieves universality/ naturalness. This has the
(ideological) effect of concealing the practices of coding which are present. Thus the audience comes to naturally accept the televisual signs. Hall says we must remain conscious about the appearance of the coded message. So it is at the connotative level of the sign that situational ideologies alter and transform signification. At this level we can see more clearly the active intervention of ideologies in and on discourse: here, the sign is open to new accentuations/interpretations. Already coded signs intersect with the deep semantic codes of a culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions.

The so-called denotative level of the televisual sign is fixed by certain, very complex (but limited or 'closed') codes. But its connotative level, though also bounded, is more open, subject to more active transformations, which exploit its **polysemic values** (multiple meanings). Every society has its **dominant – cultural – order**, which is put in the message. The message intends to give dominant or preferred meanings. The domains of **preferred meanings** have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank order of power and interest and the structure of legitimations, limits and sanctions.

The message every time does not work out as per the prearranged codes/encoding. The ideal of the broadcasters is to have **perfectly transparent communication**. Instead, what they have to confront is **systematically distorted communication**. According to Stuart Hall, there will always be private, individual, variant readings.