

Use of communication research : both in Thailand and abroad

Atal, Yogesh; Lozare, Benjamin V; Wongmonta, Seri

1984

Atal, Y., Lozare, B. & Wongmonta, S. (1984). Use of communication research : both in Thailand and abroad. In AMIC-Chiangmai University Refresher Course on Communication Research Methodology : Chiangmai, Oct 29-Nov 2, 1984. Singapore: Asian Mass Communication Research & Information Centre.

<https://hdl.handle.net/10356/101049>

**Use Of Communication Research :
Both In Thailand And Abroad**

By

**Yogesh Atal,
Benjamin Lozare
&
Seree Wongmonta**

USE OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH : BOTH IN
THAILAND AND ABROAD

Presented
1975

By Dr. Yogesh Atal
Dr. Benjamin Lozare
Dr. Seree Wongmonta

r. Atal : First of all, I do not call any academic qualification in communication, because in my country we still do not have a post graduate degree in mass communication. I would like you to put it in an over all context of relevance of communication and communication research and the world as a whole, so that I can locate the priority is an interest in Asean and their context. We are all familiar with the fact that the world is a global village and as a village you have international contact. perhaps now cross-country communication is becoming more and more significant. We, the different communities in different countries of the world, are coming closer.

Thanks to advances in science and technology particularly. We are now on the threshold of a new revolution and that is called the information revolution, and in this sense even the word "communication" is getting a much broader definition than it was earlier this time. But when you talk to communication specialists generally, you'll find exposure is much more narrowly specific specialized rather than a broader view of communication. Communication is easily translated into mass communication, and then mass communication is easily translated into hardware of mass communication.

In developed communication, you cannot afford to be unidisciplinary, you have to be inter-disciplinary; you have to know sociology, you have to know psychology, you have to know economics, culture, art, etc. So if we are talking of mass communication in Nepal and Maldives, it is different in meaning from

talking of mass communication in the United States and the United Kingdom.

Communication in a broader sense would cover three kinds of transactions. Communication between man, communication of materials and communication of messages. People who move from one area to another and he also passes over the border. People are also getting exposure to other things and begin interacting and communicating. Similarly materials get transferred from situation to situation. So when we are talking of communication we are not simply talking of communication.

In the field of communication if we care to examine research, we'll have to accept that communication is a specialized discipline. In terms of research you can easily find 2 or 3 phases of research of communication.

One thing that I would say; most of the research in the area of communication has been done in the West. In those countries communication arises first and communication research follows. In our countries, communication research has arisen first and in many countries the modern media of communication hasn't yet to arise so we have almost a contrasting situation. And when those people in the West studied the effect of communication they did not have any real control experiment situation : both communication, research methodology and the communication technology that would be possible in the case of third world countries particularly in Asia to set up real control experiment situations. The major challenge output to students of communication is a lack of the certain time. Then we can use communication of framework to study societies which are not exposed to mass media.

So if you want to research actually : this world-client-oriented research like consumer research, research on advertising, research on election campaign, research on public opinion. In order to find out how the campaign, strategy, as the communication

-74-

work and how people are responding. But the interrelationship between communication and many major problems contrasting the society was still beyond the scope of those who are doing communication research, nor could they have done it. But they thought that this is where they had to start.

When innovations from outside were brought into these societies and it was a question of acceptability of those innovations, communication research was involved, to study causes and factors responsible for acceptance and objection of innovations. In the area of educational psychology, learning theory pays attention to find out how people learn and then to use that in order to develop programs through the mass media so that people can learn better through the media. And, later on some model scientific study using statistical methods and sophisticated sociological survey. We had at that time, the theory of two-step flow of communication and feed back and several these models came : Who says what to whom and what effect.

We have also noticed that in communication field some people already begin to have it engagement with statistic techniques and thought that more qualitative analysis would help them. And, there was also the examination of many of the concepts and models of communication research which should be provided by our western peers. This is part of what you called a new syndrome in social science research which is called a need, a desire, that we should research which is relevant to our concerns, that we should find out our own concept and our own models and matters because the western concept, western matters, and western models are not suitable to our countries, that questionnaires are a useless tool because we have many illiterate people and they can't answer questions so that we have to schedule or focus interviews and some other techniques. They have gathered and challenged some of these theories because they have derived from the west and, therefore, they lack in the universal applicability.

Now, where do we stand today? I think, we are now in the world of serveral imbalances. There are imbalance in terms of research on communication done in countries, there are some countries who have very high incidents of research. You also find imbalance in terms of exposure to communication, mass media, etc.

What we read in Bangkok Post is more relevant to an American citizen rather than to a citizen in Thailand. But, then Bangkok Post's emphasis remains that one. If you see TV news through the satellite, you are almost see to any cities of the United States rather than any cities in Bangkok because how much of time is consumed in telling about the election strategy of Mondale and Ronald Reagan. How much of that you listen. But any other part of the world, you're welcome to know only very drastic happens. So even in a given country people might have done more research on advertising or propaganda or on radio/TV. This is true of the world as a whole that we are in the situation of imbalance. I'll give you 4-5 of the areas in which the research ought to be done. One area is linking nation building with communication. What is the role of communication in nation building. Particularly it becomes important in the country where there is a desire to move over from international language to national language as medium of instruction, and in the rural society where you have more than one cultures and more than one languages : There is a real crisis of communication across ethnic groups. How language and nation building can be studied. And, How different countries are facing the problem of posting the national language as the integrated factors is really a question in the realm of communication research.

Why are they all exposed to the same medium and same exposure. Yet the selectivity process of the people is something that ought to be investigated. For example, all people do not approach media with the view to learning, with the view to get educated; some people approach media only with the view to get

some entertainment and not education. Finally, I would suggest that one area of analysis, particularly in the third world country, is the phenomenon of dominants in communication content.

I'll be giving some examples of this : Dominant in communication context : from where do the media get their content, whether this is nation is specific or it is coming in terms of programs from abroad. And, we're getting exposed to that. And relate this to the dominant switch. The twin questions of great social concerns that is cultural identity and area nations : What is the extent to which communication strategy can influence the process of establishing cultural identity, what is the extent to which communication strategies can prevent area nations, growing national and individualism among people. So, you'll find a whole host of problem, if so, have had to be selective, and the selectivity will be decided by our concerns for relevance for our need within society, and, our capability to investigate phenomena that need to be investigated.

There is one more area of research that you might like to investigate and that's a linkage between producer of research and user of research because this is a general problem of society. People talk of utilization of social science research. I'd say it is non-utilization of social scientist. Whether it is the fault of the social scientist that they have done research on such thing because it's non-utilizable. It is irrelevant research on that research is irrelevant but it is unreliable research. The point that our senior professors were mentioning. That research was not available in time for the policy maker so they can't make use of it. So it's really a study both of the producer of researcher as well as the user or consumer of research. There is a need to find out why social science research remains unutilized rather than just putting blame on one party or the other.

Dr. Lozare : It is not so easy to talk about communication research in Asia. Probably, Because Asia is more a geographical classification than a cultural one. We put together Japan, Korea, China, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Singapore and Indonesia. And, we know that there are so many differences among these countries though there could be also some similarities. Probably, we can follow a framework in the form of three questions which I think that we need to ask ourselves. Where do you want to go? what direction should we proceed? And how to get there?

In these three questions, by the way, I have a personal bias. I think the first two questions are very difficult to answer. And no.3, compared to the first two is relatively easy. So that in many instances, we find ourselves answering no.3 question first before answering the first two. So we know how to get 3. But, we don't know where we are and where we want to go. I think in many countries in Asia, research is extra income for scholars, for academics. I think. We all know the salary of professors in Asia, more countries, most of the countries is naturally changed it could be higher.

We judge the faculty salary and research often times come in the form of superman income. But the consequence of these is that, it makes us available to incentives from funding agencies. We undertake research in areas where there is money. So we have a lot of family planning communication studies in the sixty's because that is where the money was. We don't really study things on the basis of what we would like to do. We can see, I think, a phenomenon of study on communication and natural development on nutrition, health or many of these things because it's an area where we find a lot of resources. We also perhaps could know more micro studies in this country than macro ones. So we have many studies of religions, districts, say northern, southern Thailand, But very few macro level studies which is done in nationwide scale. And we have very little regional studies which

compare communication development or infra-structure say across different countries.

Many years ago we worried about the limitation of western research methods and applied to Asian condition especially in rural Asia. Unfortunately, we still have not remedied most of these though we have made some progression as Dr. Atal says many of our ideas are still basically western and many of our concepts are basically based on western concepts. In the way, we perhaps see ourselves from western spectacle. We conduct too many surveys, probably 90%.

Some of our problems may also be shared by western research. Some of our problems are very unique, like in the Philippines. In some parts of the countries, we cannot do study unless we get clearance from the military. We cannot go to the certain areas unless we have military escorts or police escorts. And, this is a serious threat to validity of studies. In general, we probably could say we were weak in conceptualization and in conceptual application. However, most popular variables mass media exposure which I think is over used is very primitively measured simply in terms of first listening to the radio, watching television. But we don't put in the element of content. I think, it would make the difference if we say so, and what just only so many hours of TV and radio and say that such a person listens to this type of programme with so much time.

Method and procedure, I think I am still weak. as Dr. Sere mentioned in many studies we don't even have review of literature. Where do you want to go. I think and this is probably would be the personal opinion. We should probably use the concept of attitude less in our studies. This may sound like a very radical idea because if we have used the literature of communication of the past years. In effect, We could say study of attitude changes persuasion. How to change people is attitude. We have concentrated so much on the variable attitude. More reasonably, I think if we

study the data that is now available to us, we can see gaps between the knowledge and attitude. People know something good but they don't like it. Or, they may have a positive attitudes towards something and that they wouldn't do it. This is social gap between attitude and practice. But I think, in criticizing, the concept of attitude probably is the most failing.

My own opinion is that if we define attitude that way, or in that manner we are allowing and serving very little external power because what we have is actually a totally logic. If we say that suicide is caused by sub-destructive tendency inherent and mankind, which sounds like a very logical statement.

Similarly, we say the people buy the product because they like it. We are not explaining the behavior and that most of our market research study serve that nature. Put yourselves into the shoes of the marketing manager. Your product A is losing to product B you want to know why you are losing your market. So you are hiring a market research firm at ten thousand dollars to do the study. And, they come up to you and say "You know why you're losing your market? Because people have a more positive attitude towards product B. Examining most of market study, there are that nature, but doing ten thousand peso to learn that you're losing the market because people have preference towards product B. To say that someone committed suicide because he has suicidal tendency is very weak.

I think, in communication, we have suffered very greatly from that concept of attitude that we try to explain every thing on the basis of predisposition and neglect the anticident variables of the concept of attitude. Many times for here the press in Asia, a program failed because people have a negative attitude towards the government which, to me, in the sense it is the most logical description any way. just like moral response.

When I was at the Ministry of Information on time the first day I reported for work I wrote in page memo actually just one page long. It is a memo on how to answer the telephone courteously, professionally. The Ministry of Public Information in my country is supposed to be public relations army government. People don't know how to answer the telephone courteously and professionally. But we keep saying that a program failed because the people have the negative attitude towards the government. I would say that people have the right to have that negative attitude because of the quality of surveys and they care for the government so what you should change is people's attitude or antecedents of that attitude. If you, the communicator, present for developing the communication program to improve the image of policemen, that's easy. We can always come up with poster, leaflet, slide, tape, and paper presentation.

How could we ignore power... variable power in an Asian condition, if everything is just a question of awareness, knowledge attitude and practice? How can we understand the dynamic of the development in village unless we study element of power in that village? And, how that element of power prevent the development process from proceeding. I think we should also stay away from cultural study. In many parts, behaviors which may appear to be different. let's say Filipino VS Thai behavior. If we look at this from strictly functional point of view, we may see there is no difference at all. In one course taught in the U.S. has an American professor with whom we are studying Asia, he has conducted a lot of research and he surprised me when suddenly in class he asked me why it is in the Philippines you offer food to the dead when the dead can not eat. See, tomorrow is also days in the Philippines. And this is when we honor those who have passed away. I don't know if you have the same practice. All my classmates looked at me and said I'm very barbaric. My answer may be for the same reason that you throw flowers to the dead Hindu are not eating the cows when they have food problems starvation. When

-81-

Americans give up big cars when they have oil crisis. See, the cow was symbol of goodness, motherhood of India. But the car is symbol of power.

What I am trying to say I think much of our behavior cannot be explained by culture or citizenship. We say that Thai drivers are like the Filipino drivers. I like that but it is not the basis of citizenship, nor do I think it is on the basis of culture. We don't fall in line where not discipline but it is not because of my culture because it is not enough to go around. And, if you know that there is not enough bus to bring you home, you'll be pushed out. We have so many studies try to describe cultures. We should stop doing that and try to look at the variables that really shape behavior rather than go to the intervening variables that tend to be more descriptive rather than explanatory. I think we should study also relationship which is quite important.

Relationship, I think is very important variables in Asia as we say if relationship is good, big problem become small but if relation is bad, small problem become big.

Dr.Seree : Dr.Atal and Dr.Benjie mentioned that we should look at the things that could help us develop the country, and that at the same time we should look at things in relation to one another.

There are many things left in our country to do research on. As for the sources, there are plenty to be studied. For example, we can study about who has expertise, who has credibility, or between the news released by the government sector and that released by the private sector, which one the public would pick or has the tendency to believe in which source more than the other. Or among the many socialized agents such as schools, families, government and other agents, which agent could have the most impact on the people's behavior. The person who can have an impact should be the one who has believability, credibility and expertise.

-82-

At Present, many people claim that the government lacks expertise and charm and that columnists like "Mong-Kon Ha Leb," "Long-li-kit", "Zoom", "Plaew-singern" and "Son-ta-lae" may have higher credibility than others. From the study of sources we can relate it to other points as well. For example; what do these sources have to offer to the public, what is the writing style of "Mong-Kon-Ha-Leb" like? or what is the inclination and content of the TV plays of channel 5 and Channel 7? And so on.

Now let's turn to cognition; to investigate what new information is offered to the audience through the message or the content. Then we can see further about the comprehension of the message; if the audience understands the message, and how much. The Public Relations Department should do a research on whether most of the audience comprehend their official news.

Then the matter concerning perception; how the public perceives the message, what value is placed on the message. There was a study on the content of the Indian, Chinese and Thai featured films. It was discovered that the Indian films are full of jealousy, the Chinese ones are full of rancour, and the Thai, sex and luck. Or we can study the TV game shows : which program is constructive; which one is not and what impact the programs have on the audience. What content is put in the message that makes the youngsters indulge in luxury or pay a lot of money for their shirts and fashions, for their clothes and dresses. What appears in such magazines as Preaw, Praew and Dichan? Whatever the stars wear, they want to wear. These are fads and fashions inserted in the magazines. We teach the kinds to economical, but no book that they are reading offers such lessons.

As for the channel or selection of media one has to select what media to use. I saw an instructional pamphlet on breast feeding distributed to the rural people which was kept in a plastic bags and placed on the buddhist altar in a house. That's all they did. They didn't want to lose it. And when the official

-83-

went back, they showed it to him. "It's still here sir, I didn't lose it"

Next, the people's attitude towards the media; Which one convinces the people more : TV or radio, radio or newspaper, newspaper or magazine. Every media has its own sociology : the TV-family medium, the radio-private medium, the magazine-bed time medium, the newspaper-public medium. A Newspaper has higher immediacy and is the calendar of the day while a magazine has a no-time factor. You can read a magazine anytime, two weeks later, months later, no problem of currency or immediacy. We have to know all these characteristics. If we want to give something for reference, a magazine is better than a newspaper because a newspaper is thrown away. On the other hand, if we want to announce something to do with business, the newspaper will be the better medium. So there is a different impact of media. TV may be more entertaining while radio is better for instruction.

Now let us consider the receivers and their consumption patterns. We have to check when they watch or listen to the TV or radio or when they read the newspaper and how often; what is their motives. We can use the gratification theory in this study, for example, about the perception of message, source or channel. What happens to their personal evaluation or judgement. What is their predisposition prior to the exposure to the media and what is their cognitive structure like. All these deal with sources, messages, channels and relationships.

As for the effect, we should consider if there is any attitude change after being exposed to the information, and if there is any behavioral change. What happens in their learning process : what public opinion is formed; what change in the life style; the fads and fashions; what value the person picks up.

In order to do all these we have to, first of all, be able to convince the Thai government about the reliability of research.

Next we have to set the right community climate and attitude. Often times when we go out to collect data, the people will ask us what we are coming for, what is the question for. They have been questioned many times but seen no changes or improvement in their life or community. So we have to correct the climate and attitude.

Another thing is the researcher's confidence. Sometimes we researchers lack confidence in setting up hypothesis, in using statistics or in presenting our research. Sometimes we are so absorbed in theoretical values that we forget its application values. Or if we feel that our research cannot be used for anything, we will tend to give it up because we overlook its theoretical values.

How can we enjoy doing research in Thailand when the funds are so limited you have to pay for trips to provinces. Dr. Atal mentioned that we should do things at a national level, not in a limited scope. But how can we do at the national level when we do not have funds? This means we have to turn to the international sources, which I do not want to mention. Thai scholars have language problems, so it is quite a barrier, when compared to the Taiwanese, Malaysian, Filipino or Indian. When UNESCO reads the Thai scholars' proposal, they don't understand what they are trying to do. So even though it's a good review, it is rejected due to the lack of comprehension.

These are our problems. When we propose to the Thai government, they have no money. If we do research for UNESCO, the per diem is sufficient while the Thai per diem is just fifty baht a day. It just does not reflect the value of your brain. So Thai per diem does not include the value of your brain; it's only enough to survive or to succeed physically. This makes us not want to do research. Another problem with Thai scholars is that once someone gets a hand on a certain source, he never devolved the

-85-

information. He keeps it a secret in his heart and soul. Even at that time he doesn't have any idea what to do with it he would like to keep the fund untouched instead of telling someone that he knows there is a fund somewhere and encourage another person to try. Truly, I've never known of anyone who devolved such information. Interpersonal communication about financial resource of research has never been disseminated among the faculty members.

Some people are discouraged when facing highly sophisticated statistics. Others think their work does not look good when they have just frequency and crosstab so they give up. However, the problem is the lack of literature. We cannot obtain journals and quarterlies. It is hard to find advertising research, communication research or even psychology research. These publications are hardly available in libraries. Sometimes there are some, but the subscription stops at the 1974 issue.

We should now confine ourselves to just one premise. We need to go out of the discipline some. We should look at the systematic approach as well, It is a social system. If we want to consider national development; we have the government, the media, the public or channel. Each one must be a free flow of information : government to media, media to public, public to media, media to government, government to public, public to government and so on. So if we think about sub-systems as a component of the social system, there will be such variables embedded in the government such as attitude, government perception, government motive, government behavior, government activity, government performance, government message and government philosophy concerning mankind, government administration, values, beliefs, expertise, credibility. These things can be moved into the media, then moved to the public.

At the public level, there are some interesting variables such as opinion combination, attitude change or media consumption.

-86-

If we would study just these three sub-systems, there would be so many variables that we could touch. The most important one is relationship. Variables have relationship. Do not study anything in isolation. Don't look just in terms of communication but look in terms of economics, politics or sociology and many other fields including semantics, linguistics, culture and arts. I think a person who is doing a communication research should make himself an interdisciplinary, scholar rather than to be just a scholar in a communication discipline.
