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Feliciano, Gloria D.; Mercado, Cesar M.

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**Communication Research In The Philippines :
A Status Analysis**

By

**Gloria D Feliciano
&
Cesar M Mercado**

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COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN THE PHILIPPINES: A STATUS ANALYSIS

By: Gloria D Feliciano *
Cesar M Mercado *

Introduction

Early beginnings

The Western-based concept of communication research as a cross-disciplinary area of inquiry was introduced in the country at the turn of the sixties. Professors at the state university who had had advanced training in journalism in the United States pioneered in the teaching and conduct of early studies dealing with three of the elements of the communication process, i.e., media, messages and media effects on the receivers of messages.¹

Prior to the early sixties, however, media-focused studies had been done in the barrios (villages) by a visiting sociologist at the state university, John de Young and an information specialist, Marjorie Rienholt. The former studied literacy levels and availability and use of rural communications media including the village interpersonal network while the latter assessed the comprehensibility of informational materials disseminated in the villages by the government's media production agency.² At the urban level, a practising journalist, Juan Tuvera, did a status analysis of mass communications in public information offices. His study brought to light problems of lack of coordinated planning, proliferation of public information work in the various agencies and the absence of a professional attitude towards work, among others. Much earlier, inventories of print media, e.g., newspapers and other periodicals, historical accounts of these media and socio-economic profiles of consumers had been documented by practising journalists, historians and marketing analysts, respectively.³

* Professor and Dean and Associate Professor, respectively, in the University of the Philippines Institute of Mass Communication, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines.

The Sixties

The years spanning the decade of the sixties marked the beginnings of communication research by professionally trained communication researchers. They were highly productive years characterized by a variety of studies in terms of main study types, including their objectives and subject-areas of inquiry, methods, techniques and approaches used, study respondents dealt with and utilization of research findings by intended end-users.

Types of studies done

The academic setting and its concomitant limitations under which the early communication studies were done provided the rationale for the initial focus by the communication researchers on the essential elements of the communication process, namely, sources/producers of messages, the messages themselves, the media/channels and audiences/receivers of messages. Thus, the initial studies during the early 60's could be grouped under the following typologies: 1) studies of communicators/sources of information; 2) message studies; 3) media studies and 4) studies of audience/receivers of messages.

Initial efforts focused on message studies which sought to determine the extent of comprehensibility of informational materials aimed at varying levels of audiences, i.e., farmers, scientists and scholars, other members of the academic community and newspaper readers. Towards the mid-60's there occurred a shift in the attention of researchers from a presentation/style of materials to their content. Thus, various types of specialized reports in the print media were subjected to scrutiny vis-a-vis the subject-matter they carried — crime, natural disasters, foreign events, politics and government, racism, movie advertisements and others.⁴

As financial resources to undertake field work were made available to the communication researchers, the audiences/recipients of messages became the center of attention of their studies. The first audience studies were multi-disciplinary in character with communication as one of the main study components. These were done at the barrio level and dealt with individual farmer's communication behavior (including their readership, listenership and viewership profiles) and the dissemination and use of new information on farming technology. The audience studies had built-in questions which enabled the researchers to establish profiles of communicators or sources of information.⁵

One significant aspect of these studies was the documentation of the barrio interpersonal network, a mix of key persons such as the farmer and his wife, the opinion leaders, neighbours, relatives and friends, the extension workers, formal and

informal groups composed of farmers or homemakers in the village, the youth and folk media, e.g., songs, dances, verbal jousts and others.⁶

The professionals, as receivers of information, i.e., agriculturists (not extension workers), and college teachers/faculty were another group which were studied. Their feedback specifically, their perceptions and/or opinions on a variety of topics ranging from curricular matters to extension work was solicited. These data were needed to provide a basis for planning development programs that was attuned to their problems and needs.

As students of communication gained expertise and skills in research methodology, their interests turned toward the study of the sources/producers of messages at the urban level -- writers, editors, broadcasters, movie producers, public relations men, book publishers and others. Data discussed from these studies, e.g., socio-economic characteristics and communication behavior became the basis for planning short-term and long-term development programs.

Early research on the communication channels or media was limited to historical studies and investigations which dealt with their organization, structure and control. This was due to the paucity of written records which carried secondary data on the media, the lack of trained communication researchers on the historical method as applied to communications media and the cumbersome nature of the method itself.⁷

Methods and techniques used

As a subject-field, communication research is a cross-disciplinary area of inquiry to which print and broadcast journalists, humanists and behaviorists contributed toward the growth and development of communication as an academic discipline. As a process, it is concerned with the gathering, analysis, reporting and utilization of data which can lead to a better understanding and solution of certain communication and communication-related problems.

By design and/or method used, communication researchers in the Philippines can be classified into the following: historical studies, case studies, surveys, experiments, content analyses, readability studies and feasibility studies. Historical studies are useful in understanding the origin, growth and development of the communications media in the Philippines. Available media studies done in the 60's which utilized the historical method are of three types. One is the purely descriptive study which documents events in chronological order showing the growth and development of a particular medium such as a newspaper, a radio-television network, a farm magazine, cinema or a folk drama.⁸ Statistics used in these studies reinforce text,

relating to say, circulation and distribution and enhance the credibility of the reports; all too often, the latter is an unintended consequence of the use of statistics.

The case study approach is valuable in analysing a particular communication behavior such as radio listening or television viewing or the diffusion of information from its initial source to its final destination/target. Case studies on the diffusion of agricultural information in four Laguna villages were undertaken toward the mid-60's to provide additional insights into the factors which facilitate/impede the acceptance and use of farming innovations.⁹ As a study type on a "micro" level, the case study is also useful for generating benchmark data before a large-scale, "macro"-type survey is done. On the other hand, it has also been found that studies of this type are useful supplements to surveys.

As applied to communication research, the survey is admittedly one of the most useful designs in exploring the causes of a noticeable effect impinging on one or more elements of the communication process. It is likewise most useful in determining levels of knowledge and skills, attitude toward and habits of audiences relating to communications media and messages.¹⁰ Communication research in the 60's made wide use of this design in establishing baseline information on communicators and audiences. This could be attributed, in part, to the apparent bias in the training programs toward the survey for reasons of convenience, manageability and the availability of trained personnel to implement a survey.

The experiment enables the study of the impact of effectiveness of a communication activity, e.g., use of radio, or printed material or discussions to support classroom lectures, or the comparative effectiveness of these communications media. This is made possible by establishing a functional relationship between a cause (radio) or causes (radio, printed material, group discussions) and a speculated effect (higher pupils' test scores). By the very nature of its design, this method reduces the extent of external bias as well as the internal uncertainty or ambiguity of the experimental study results. The first communication experiments done in the 60's dealt with ascertaining the comparative effectiveness of black and white and coloured illustrations and of reports written in either technical, or semi-technical or popularized language.¹¹

The phrase "old wine in a new bottle" could well apply to content analysis. The method is not new for, when one reads a publication and interprets it, he, in effect, is engaged in content analysis. What the communication researchers have done is to broaden its scope of application and systematize the process to increase its validity and reliability.

The readability test has been developed by communication researchers in an attempt to make their written work "communicate", i.e., be understood by their readers. The test is based on a list of commonly used and understood terms and the use of one or more sources of reading difficulty such as long words, long sentences, modifiers and others. Conventional methods include recall-type tests such as "fill the blanks" or "multiple choice" used in 'communication arts' courses in the elementary grades.¹²

The feasibility study, sometimes referred to in technical jargon as pre-investment study, is useful in projecting the viability of setting up new communications institutions, in implementing new action programs or projects or simply one aspect or component of such programs or projects. This design takes into account, among other things, the cost requirements as well as benefits in terms of objectives or goals, e.g., the setting up of a radio station in a community where print media do not exist.¹³

Subject-areas of inquiry

As may be gleaned from the previous discussion, the subject-areas of inquiry of communication studies done in the 60's include the low level of comprehensibility of communication messages, absence or lack of benchmark information to enable communication researchers to conduct more complex studies as basis for policy and planning, and especially to provide guidelines for improving the media industry, the physical reach of messages, lack of informational and educational materials for classes, the lack of information on the development-orientation of the communications media, limits to press freedom on local media practice and others.

Utilization of research findings

Communication research in the decade of the 60's was problem-oriented in response to (a) development priorities and needs either on an individual or community level, (b) institutional-building requirements, e.g., developing curricula, teaching materials, training programs, etc., (c) professionalizing the communications media, particularly print, and (d) solving various communication problems, e.g., lessening attrition rate of faculty and staff, deciding on the advisability of abolishing the thesis requirement and so forth.

In summary, communication studies undertaken in the 60's were mostly applied in nature and problem-oriented, except for university-initiated research. Focus appeared to be in favour of the modern mass media and the neglect of the more traditional, more interpersonal folk forms in the rural areas. There appeared to have been little room for innovativeness because most of the studies were done in-house

rather than in the field. Immediate and direct utilization of research findings especially those dealing with the press was assured through the then Press Institute and the Press Council.¹⁴

The seventies

Beginning in the 70's, particularly after Proclamation No. 1081, the focus of communication studies has been in the following areas: (1) communication support to development programs and projects; (2) cooperative, multi-national studies; (3) policy research for institutional development and support; and (4) multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary studies.

Communication support to development

The accelerated communication effort in support to development programs and projects in the 70's has increasingly required large outlays of human, financial and material resources and facilities. Consequently, this has led some administrators of these programs and projects to recognise the need to study these communication efforts in order to understand better the role they play in the pursuit of program objectives, gain knowledge of the strong and weak points of the program measured in terms of their functions and assess their impact on the improvement or success of the communication component of the program or of the program as a whole. Hence, the emergence of developmental-type studies which deal with the communication aspects of essential components of development such as agrarian reform, population planning, nutrition, drug abuse prevention, civic-action information campaigns, out-of-school programs and projects, use of communications technology for mass education and others.¹⁵

Of the above components of development, population planning has been given the most attention by communication researchers due, in part, to the availability of financial support in this area of inquiry. The studies reported in the literature have made much use of analysis and synthesis of existing data, the case approach, the experimental method and the survey. There is a preponderance of (a) evaluative studies dealing with the four elements of the communication process as these relate to communication problems at the field level; (b) benchmark studies on the folk media as well as determining the feasibility of using these traditional vehicles of entertainment to achieve development objectives; and (c) action-research or operations studies which are primarily designed to serve decision-makers.¹⁶ There are a few studies dealing with research methodology. Those reported in the literature focus on the determination of the validity and reliability of particular research instruments, e.g., the KAP questionnaire.¹⁷

Cooperative, multi-national studies

The need to pool and conserve scarce resources and facilities in the development, production and dissemination of information and education materials, minimize the problem of comparability and compatibility of communication models and approaches and make these more relevant and applicable to more countries as well as the desire to extend the boundaries of regional cooperation between countries of a particular region or regions have led to the sponsorship of multi-national research in communication by international funding agencies. This type of research have been done and/or are now being done between countries within a region or continent or between regions or continents. Some illustrative cases in which the Philippines has either participated or is participating, follow: (1) husband-wife communication in selected Asian countries;¹⁸ (2) studies of media habits, the patterns of perception and the information needs of media audiences across Asia;¹⁹ (3) communication strategies in rural development;²⁰ (4) the community press in Asia;²¹ the flow of TV news in selected Asian countries;²² and multi-media support to population programs in the context of rural development.²³

Policy-research and multi-disciplinary studies

The increasing recognition by governments of the importance of using the findings of research as basis for policy and/or action has provided a rationale for policy-oriented studies in communication. This applies to the Philippines as much as it does to other countries in the ASEAN region. This is evident in both government and private media. Content analyses of the peoples' feedback in referendum remark sheets, media monitoring and analyses of media, viz., management of media resources, regulation of media, assessment of public information problems and needs at the office and field levels and methodological studies are some examples of policy studies in communication conducted over the last five years. Results of these studies have been used by the persons and institutions concerned for policy formulation and for planning institutional development programs and projects. For instance, the results of methodological studies have been integrated into the course content of communication research courses, the feedback analyses findings have provided the basis of guidelines for improving the conduct of referenda, and so forth.²⁴

The necessity for undertaking multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral studies in communication is dictated by considerations of economy, the complex nature of development problems and the need for making research findings acceptable to larger segments of society. Completed and on-going studies in this area deal with socio-cultural factors affecting urbanization and the use of advanced communications technology in formal and non-formal education.²⁵

Trends and Developments

A second look at the communication studies done in the 60's and 70's presented in the foregoing section as well as in the footnotes at the end of this chapter, point to several trends and developments in terms of the following aspects: 1) scope; 2) respondents subjects; 3) manpower resource; 4) analysis; 5) reporting and others.

Scope

In terms of coverage, communication studies in the Philippines are shifting back to where they started. The early pioneering communication studies conducted in the late 50's and early 60's as reported earlier in this chapter were nationwide in scope. However, the succeeding ones become delimited, covering at most a few provinces or villages. The increasing support for communication studies account for this development. In 1974, the state university's school of communication in the Diliman campus, officially known as the U.P. Institute of Mass Communication (UP-IMC), in cooperation with the Philippine Council for Agricultural and Resources Research (PCARR), the Department of Agrarian Reform Education Services (DAR-ARES) and the University of the Philippines at Los Banos Agrarian Reform Education Service (UPLB-ARI) conducted a nation-wide study on the communication aspect of agrarian reform.²⁶ A year later, the UP-IMC, in cooperation with the Commission on Population (POPCOM) and the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) conducted a survey of communication "infrastructures" in the 13 regions of the country.²⁷ Results of this survey were used in planning the IEC (Information, Education and Communication) strategy of the POPCOM. The support of the same agencies led to the conduct of five mobile or "travelling" experiments in strategic areas throughout the country.²⁸

Respondents/subjects

Since the Philippines is largely rural, it is expected that the majority of the available communication researchers have rural respondents or subjects. The nationwide studies which were mentioned earlier dealt with such respondents. In general, university research provides an exception to this situation. In the schools, there is a considerable number of communication studies which use students as respondents. This is understandable considering the fact that these are the most available subjects and owing to constraints of time and financial resources for student project.

Manpower resource

The main sources of manpower in communication research in the Philippines are the different schools offering communication degrees. Heading the list of these schools in terms of research capability and output are the UP-IMC in Diliman and the Department of Development Communication at U.P. Los Banos. Most of the communication studies available in the country today come from these two agencies. The other leading communication schools which are contributing to the increasing research output are the Department of Communication, Ateneo de Manila University, the School of Journalism and Communication at Silliman University, and the Faculty of Arts and Letters at the University of Sto. Tomas. The other schools which have the manpower to conduct communication researches are the Lyceum of the Philippines School of Journalism, Maryknoll College Department of Communication Arts, Centro Escolar University, Philippine Women's University, St. Paul's College, San Beda College, Pamantasan ng Maynila, and Far Eastern University.²⁹

Government information agencies such as the Department of Public Information in the National Media Production Center have, in the 70's increased their research capabilities. Other development-oriented agencies have likewise begun doing communication studies in support of their programs and projects.³⁰

One of the private agencies which has contributed much to audience research in the Philippines is the Philippine Mass Communication Research Society (PMCRS), a Metro-Manila based research outfit. Some advertising agencies have also established core research staff in support of their media work.

Method of analysis

The statistical method of analysis that are commonly used in communication studies in the Philippines are the percentage and some measures of central tendency and the chi-square. They are sufficient to meet the objectives of these studies, hence, are widely used. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) is the most widely used statistical tool in experiments. This tool is very useful in determining the comparative effectiveness of the various media and media approaches.

Reporting

One of the bottlenecks in the utilization of researches is the late reporting of research results. The usual practice is to wait for the entire study or package of studies to be completed before these are reported to planners, implementors and the general public. Attempts to report finished portions of studies on piecemeal basis appear to solve the problem. There is also an increasing interest shown by the newspapers in reporting the results of communication researches.

One noteworthy development in reporting communication studies is the printing of a monograph on "Communication and Adoption in Rural Development".³¹ This monograph is a project of the U.P. Community Development Research Council (UP-CDRC), the UP-IMC and the Department of Agriculture. The publication presents an analysis of all communication studies in the Philippines from 1955 to 1972. Written in very simple language, 7,000 copies of this monograph have been distributed to provincial agriculturists and extension workers of the Department of Agriculture throughout the country. The demand is such that an additional 5,000 copies will soon be re-printed.

Other developments

In the past, communication researches in the Philippines tended to follow the trend in the more advanced countries. However, with the increasing involvement of local communication researchers in development projects, they soon recognised the limitations of Western research methods when used in developing countries like the Philippines.³² Thus, a growing divergence is now evident between communication researches in the developing countries and the more advanced countries.

One point of divergence lies in the orientation of researches, in general. In the more developed countries, communication researches are becoming more theory-oriented; in the developing countries, communication studies have tended to be more problem-oriented. This is understandable. In the more developed countries, there is a proliferation of communication theories which need to be tested. Most of these theories are at the micro level. In the developing countries, many of the communication problems related to development projects are at the macro level, which Western theories are inadequate to explain. It appears that the proper approach to communication research in the country at this stage is to build models based on actual field situation, then test these models in the field for further refinement and validation.

Another point of divergence has to do with the research designs that are now commonly used in these countries. While communication researches in the more developed countries are more based towards the laboratory experiment, in the developing countries, the trend is towards action-research or operations studies. It appears that communication researches in the former will become more quantitative, whereas studies in the latter are bound towards a happy balance of the quantitative and qualitative approaches. It would seem that in development, the communication process is as important as the effect. The trend in communication research in the country recognises the importance of the philosophy.

Some problems and prospects

The problems confronting communication research in the country today can be categorised under three main headings, namely: 1) lack of support from administration or management to do communication research; 2) inadequate resources and facilities to do communication research and, as has been pointed out, 3) imbalance of focus in favour of action-research. These problems are interrelated, interdependent and overlapping.

The lack of support from administration or management to conduct communication studies is due, in part, to the lack of knowledge about the nature and value of communication research to development policy, planning and implementation of programs and projects. This results partly in the second problem cited, i.e., inadequate resources and facilities — physical, material, financial — to do communication research. Exceptions occur when communication researchers themselves become fund-raisers for their own research projects, or when new policy is contemplated for which no adequate rationale exists.

The emphasis of studies in the direction of action-research or operations studies to the neglect of basic research, e.g., studies that will contribute to theory or model-building, development of research methods, techniques and tools and of indicators or measures of media development, is also partly due to the first two problems cited. Basic research is expensive in terms of time, funds and effort. Moreover, the results do not lend themselves directly and immediately to the creation of “impact” that would create an impression on administration or management.

But, there is room for optimism: more students now are becoming genuinely interested in pursuing a formal course in communication research;³³ more researchers are being promoted to administrator — or management — level positions; there are now more opportunities for communication research-trained graduates to fill in research positions or positions in development planning; there are also more funding agencies who are becoming open to the inclusion of a communication component in a social or behavioral research project. The prospects are many and bright and the challenge is great. It is up to the communication researchers to take advantage of the prospects and respond to the challenge.

Footnotes and Notes

1. Gloria D. Feliciano and Crispulo J. Icban, "Communication Research", in Philippine Mass Media in Perspective, Gloria D. Feliciano and Crispulo J. Icban (eds.), pp. 249-282.
2. The agency referred to is the National Media Production Center. The overall objective of the National Media Production Center is to "facilitate national development through the production of development information communication. It also aims to contribute to the growth of communication research in the country. It has the added responsibility of projecting to the outside world the national image of the Philippines. From Public Information: Issues and Facts. Studies submitted by the Institute of Mass Communication, Working Group to the Ad Hoc Presidential Committee on Information Policies. Page 68.
3. Gloria D. Feliciano, "An Overview of Communication Research in Asia: Status, Problems and Needs", in No. 6, Papers of the East-West Communication Institute, pp. 1-20, 1973.
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9. ———, "Diffusion of Agricultural Information in Four Laguna Barrios: Some Emerging Patterns", Paper presented at the IRRI Seminar, June 10, 1965 (mimeographed).
10. Gloria D. Feliciano, "A Manual of Research in Family Planning Communication", a project of the Division of Development and Application of Communication. UNESCO, Paris.
11. Cesar M. Mercado, Gloria D. Feliciano and Thomas G. Flores, "The Relative Effectiveness of Four Types of Extension Publications", in The Philippines Agriculturists, Vol. XLIV, No. 10, March 1966, pp. 833-843.

Ely D. Gomez, Relative Effectiveness of Four Types of Informational Materials to PACD Adult Classes in Some Laguna Barrios. UP College of Agriculture, November 1964 (Unpublished Master's Thesis).
12. Modern readability tests corresponding to these conventional methods include the "Cloze Procedure".

13. These types of studies have been neglected due to the lack of qualified researchers in what has been described as a new field -- media economics. There appears to be a need for collaboration between communication specialists and economists in doing this type of studies.
14. The Philippine Press Institute at that time ran a monthly newsletter, Press Forum which was the venue of communication research reports written in popularized form.
15. EDPITAF, A Handbook on Broadcasting in the Philippines, PIS-CTE, 1976, pp. 150-151.

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Reynaldo V. Guioquio, et. al, A Study of the Communication Factors Related to Drug Abuse Prevention Education in Selected Communities in the Philippines. UP-IMC, September 1977.
16. Alice M.L. Coseteng and Gemma A. Nemenzo, Folk Media in the Philippines, Monograph, Institute of Mass Communication, University of the Philippines, Quezon City.

Cesar M. Mercado, et. al, Program Support Operations Research, UP-IMC/POPCOM/UNFPA, 1977.
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29. Cesar M. Mercado, The Status and Needs of Communication Research in the Philippines, Benchmark Information PCAR First National Agriculture System Research Congress, UP at Los Banos Campus, Los Banos, Laguna, February 12-17, 1973.
30. These agencies include the Communication Foundation for Asia and the Population Center Foundation.
31. Cesar M. Mercado, Communication and Adoption in Rural Development, UP-CDRC/UP-IMC/DA, 1976.