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Emerging Trends And Needs In Communication Research

By

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Emerging Trends and Needs in Communication Research

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Introduction

The subject given to me is rather broad. It would be too presumptions of me to think that I can cover all the emerging trends and needs in communication research. The areas I can cover is limited to the areas in which I have been involved in some way or another. Here I would like to limit the areas to the following four areas: (1) Mass media effects, (2) "information society studies" or studies on the impact of information technologies, (3) international information flows, and (4) development and communication.

Mass Media Effects

(1) Autonomy of the receiver: Why couldn't the mass media in Socialist countries prevent the collapse of Socialist regimes?

"Autonomy of the receiver" is an old and new issue in communication research. Some schools such as (neo) Marxist, mass society and mass persuasion schools have claimed that the masses are dominated and manipulated by the government elite through their "powerful mass media", other schools such as "uses and gratification" and selective exposure schools have emphasized that people watch what they want to watch and do not listen to what they do not want to listen. These theories cover some parts of truth, and popularity and emphasis have shifted from time to time.

In my recent article entitled "Information Technologies and Telecommunications and Political Implications for East European Countries" (ITO, forthcoming a), I tried to answer the question "Why didn't the mass media have any effect in maintaining the socialist system in many Socialist countries?" Many conventional theories on mass media effects, especially "powerful media theories" would not explain the "collapse of Socialist regimes." If the mass media controlled or manipulated by the government had powerful effects, Socialist regimes should not have collapsed. Then can the "collapse" of Socialist regimes be explained?

In the article mentioned above, I emphasized the importance of "credibility" given to the mass media by the masses. Mass media effects can be expressed by the following formula:

\[ \text{Effect} = \text{Credibility} \times \text{Quantity} \]

Also, I emphasized that people not only receive but also extract information from their direct environment as well as the mass media. If information transmitted from mass media is congruent with information extracted from direct environment and experiences, the mass media can maintain credibility. If, however, transmitted information and extracted information are always incongruent, the mass media lose credibility because people tend to use extracted information as litmus paper to test the credibility of mass media.

The relationships between mass media effects, information...
IIS i n I e rined i a t p variables. In some theories, the “feedback” loop is considered (e.g., Schramm, 1965; DeFleur & Ball-Rokeach, 1966). It is, however, incorporated only as a channel for small modifications on the mass media side and the direction of flows of information, and influence in “bipolar models” is predominantly one way, i.e., from mass media to receiving individuals or society.

In my recent article entitled “From Bipolar Models of Mass Media Influence to a Tri-polar Model of Social Consensus Formation” (Ito, forthcoming b), I proposed a “tri-polar model.” According to this model, social consensus is formed consisting of the government, the mass media and the masses.

Ito (1990) argued that when one of the three components disagree with the other two, it receives strong pressure for compliance from the other two leading to its gradual concession and change. Japanese prewar experiences indicate that it was the mass media, public attitudes and a part of the government such as the military that first created the chauvinistic kuyuki (social pressure requiring compliance) due to international and domestic political and economic situations at that time, the chauvinistic kuyuki was reinforced and helped militarists take over the government.

Many documents and records indicate that Emperor Hirohito had consistently wanted peace. As early as the time of the Manchurian Incident he was unhappy about the actions of his military. Although Emperor Hirohito expressed his wishes and “grave concerns” on many occasions, his expressions were too indirect, roundabout, ambiguous, weak and were made more ambiguous by court bureaucrats around him. Court bureaucrats...
leaders. When each component has relatively large percentage of opponents in itself, the power of kuuki cannot become strong even if two of the three components agree.

In other words, the power of kuuki is influenced by the degree of homogeneity within each component, i.e., the mass media, the government, and the public. When more than two thirds of Diet members and more than two thirds of mass media eagerly support and propagate some idea, intense kuuki is created functioning as a strong pressure on the third component, public attitudes. Similarly, when more than two thirds of respondents in public opinion polls and more than two thirds of Diet members (or more than two thirds of major mass media) support and propagate some idea, intense kuuki is created functioning as a strong pressure on the third component, the mass media (or the government). However, when the difference between proponents and opponents within each component is small, the power of kuuki becomes weaker.

The reason for compliance to kuuki is not only psychological but also practical and reasonable. Resistance against kuuki can cause not only embarrassment or psychological discomfort but also actual practical damage such as defeat in election, loss of circulation, verbal or physical attack, etc.

One of the reasons why civilian leaders in the prewar Japanese government failed to control the military was the threat of terrorism. If the mass media and the public had supported civilian leaders and been more critical of the military and terrorism, civilian leaders would have been able to better control the military.

The development pattern of kuuki differs from one issue to
Many factors proposed by sociologists as causes of social change or modernization such as religious reforms, rationalism, democratization, etc., were natural outcomes of new information technologies at that time, mass printing technology for example, and the rapid increase of information flows and diffusion of education. Thus, theories and studies by scholars like Harold Inis, Marshall McLuhan, Elizabeth Eisenstein are now being incorporated in the "information society studies." I discussed these new trends in my article entitled "Johoka as a Driving Force of Social Change" (Ito, 1991).

International Information Flows

Unbalanced flows of information among nations cause political and cultural problems. While the demands for drastic change of the existing world information order (the "New World Information Order [NWIO]") were stressed, empirical studies have been conducted on the causes of unbalanced flows. These studies revealed that the factors determining the direction and volume of international information flows differed from one kind of media to another. The factors accounting for the international flows of news, for example, are different from those accounting for the flows of television programs. Furthermore, it was revealed that there were "static factors"
and "dynamic factors." "Static factors" such as geography, distance, common language, cultural similarity, etc., and "dynamic factors" include military, political, and economic strength and the degree of influence as in other countries.

In my article entitled "The Trade Winds Change Japan's Shift from an Information Importer to an Information Exporter, 1965-1985" (Ito, 1990), I described why and how Japan changed its position from an information importer to an information exporter during the twenty years between 1965 and 1985. The pattern of news flows from and to Japan in the 1960s was similar to many Third World countries at present. The pattern, however, gradually changed in the 1970s, and in a survey conducted in the early 1980s, there were only three countries in the world where mass media coverage about Japan is less than that of mass media coverage about them; they were the United States, the Soviet Union and China. Japanese experiences indicate that there is high correlation between the pattern of news flows and the country's economic strength and political influence.

Similar arguments are possible regarding the internationalization of popular culture. In a survey conducted in the early 1970s, the import and export of television programs in Japan were balanced. In a survey conducted in the early 1990s, however, the amount of export doubled whereas the amount of import remained about the same as in the early 1970s. The export amount of television programs and other popular cultural products seems to be highly correlated with the scale of the industry. If the scale of the industry is large, it can produce high quality popular cultural products with low cost, and these products can be highly competitive in the international market.

The scale of industry also affects international flows of investment. The Japanese electronics industry began to heavily invest in Hollywood in 1989. The amount of investment exceeded 10 billion dollars altogether, which is about the same as Japan's financial contribution to the Gulf War in 1990 or about half of the financial aid that G-7 countries are planning to provide Russia. As a result, two of the seven major film companies in Hollywood (Columbia Pictures and Universal Pictures) were completely purchased by Japanese electronics companies (Sony and Matsushita) and two others (Time-Warner and Walt Disney Production) accepted heavy Japanese investment (by Toshiba, Ito Chu, and others). Jeremy Tunstall, the author of "The Media are American" (Tunstall, 1977), now says jokingly that he is writing a book entitled "The Media are No Longer American."

What I want to emphasize based on Japanese experiences is the importance of international economic competition. International flows of news, popular culture and investment are changeable reflecting economic conditions of each country. I would not be surprised even if the Kabuki Theater in Tokyo comes to be purchased by Taiwanese or Singaporean capitals. Nobody imagined ten years ago that Japanese capitals might purchase Hollywood. Discussions on "cultural imperialism," "media imperialism," or "New World Information Order" should take this fluidity and changeability into consideration.

Studies on Development and Communication
Japanese experts tend to be more sympathetic to orthodox Western theories than to the dependency theory. Japanese experts, however, believe that the orthodox Western theories are not sufficient. Orthodox Western theories tell, for example, how to develop but do not tell how to catch up. It is obvious that developing countries have developed if compared with the past. They, however, cannot catch up with advanced industrial countries because industrial countries are also developing as rapidly as or more rapidly than developing countries. In my view, to develop or grow and to catch up are different matters and this is the point lacking in orthodox Western theories on development and communication.

In my recent article entitled “Theories on Development and Communication from a Japanese Perspective” (Ito, forthcoming), I proposed a “Japanese model of development and communication.” First, I tried to answer the question using many studies on Japanese modernization. If Japan could quickly and successfully catch up with Western powers, why couldn’t culturally and historically similar countries like China or Korea? Of course, there are many ideas and theories trying to answer this question, but the three factors that I thought most relevant to communication were: (1) world view as the “hierarchy of competing nations” held by not only the leading elite but also the general masses in Japan even before this century (2) educated and informed masses (the literacy rate in Japan in the early 19th century was about the same as those in major Western countries and much higher than any non-Western countries and only Japan in the non-Western world had
Some LDCs are doing very well in educating the masses and increasing the amount of information supply. They believe that information is a powerful tool for development. However, they have not developed a sophisticated mass media system in Japan or Europe. Therefore, although collectivism exists in the family and local community, it may not develop efficiently at higher levels. They do not know well how to make collective function on the national and international organizational levels.

Therefore, in many LDCs, national and business leaders demand collectivistic dedication from the masses or employees to accelerate development, while they themselves think and behave individually. Collectivism never functions under this combination.

Mass media can contribute to development through the creation and dissemination of "competitive consciousness" among people. This consciousness can be created through dissemination of information regarding international rankings, (2) provision of accurate information congruent with the "extracted information" that the masses have, and (3) surveillance and criticism of national and business leaders' behavior to make healthy collectivism function as expected.

It is true that the "Japanese model of development and communication" or Japanese experiences in the kind of pluralistic mass media system cannot be easily applicable to all LDCs, developed countries before the 1920s, and between 1920 and 1960. There should be something that LDCs or newly emerging nations can learn from the "Japanese model" or Japanese experiences.

REFERENCES


