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Conference Report
AMIC CONFERENCE ON “PRIORITIES IN COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH IN ASIA” HELD AT AMIC CONFERENCE CENTRE, SINGAPORE
From 17th to 21st May 1982

CONFERENCE REPORT

1. There has been a growing awareness of the need for research in the field of communications. The Intergovernmental Conference on Communications Policies in Asia and Oceania, held in Kuala Lumpur in 1979, “stressed the importance of research at various points in the preparation of communication policy and planning”.

2. The International Commission for the Study of Communication Problem (MacBride Report: 1980) has also drawn attention to this need.

3. Accordingly, the Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC), organised a Conference on “Priorities in Communications Research in Asia”. This seminar was held at its Conference Centre in Singapore from 17th to 21st May 1982. Ten Communication Researchers and Policy-makers, representing Bangladesh, Hongkong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand, Observers from UNESCO, AIBD and the National University of Malaysia, AMIC Secretary-General and other professional staff took part in the conference.

4. The conference was declared open by Mr Roy O Daniel, Chairman of AMIC. He drew attention of participants to recent organisational changes at AMIC and emphasised that AMIC should function more as a documentation and research centre, in keeping with its original objectives. The Secretary-General of AMIC, Mr Sarath Amunugama also highlighted the centrality of research to AMIC’s objectives and programme of work. He said that being the largest NGO in the field of communications in Asia, and having accreditation with UNESCO, AMIC was in a position to take a more objective and critical view of developments in the communications field in the region. The strength of AMIC, he said, was its broad-based character having 540 individual members and 68 institutional members. Referring to research, he drew attention to the need to: (a) consolidate research, and (b) ensure satisfactory dissemination and utilisation of such research. Mr S M Ali, UNESCO Regional Advisor on Communications, referred to growing links between AMIC and UNESCO and emphasised that UNESCO considers the encouragement of research in communications as one of its major responsibilities. He also expressed willingness to help in following up on recommendations of this conference. Mr Brajesh Bhatia, representing the Director of Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (AIBD), spoke of areas of mutual cooperation between AMIC and AIBD.
Hon. Lee Khoon Choy, Senior Minister of State of the Prime Minister's Office, Singapore met the participants at tea and wished the conference all success.

5. The main discussion paper was presented by Dr Gloria Feliciano. She reviewed and evaluated existing Communications Research in the region and analysed some of the trends, as far as they could be elicited from these studies. Her paper also focussed on gaps in existing knowledge and identified, very comprehensively, priority areas needing research in the field of communications. It also analysed the role of AMIC in communications Research in the region.

6. The following discussion papers were presented to the conference:

1. Dr K E Eapen — “Administrative and Critical Research: Notes on the Site Experiment”
2. Dr Ralph Pieris — “Communication Research Priorities in Economic Development with special reference to Sri Lanka”
3. Dr Vincent Lowe — “Social Research on Broadcasting: Some Proposals”
4. Mr Masood-Ur-Rauf — “Use of Communications in the Educational Sector; the case of Pakistan”
5. Dr Boonlert Supadhiloke — “Communications Research and Rural Development in Thailand: An Overall Review”
6. Mr Abdus Sobhan — “Priorities of Communications Research in Bangladesh”
7. Dr Eddie Kuo — “Communications Research in Singapore: An Overview and a Proposal”
8. Dr Timothy Yu — “Communication Priorities in China”
9. Dr Alwi Dahlan — “Communications Research for Policy-makers and Planners: Some preliminary observations”

Mr S M Ali addressed the conference on “UNESCO and Communications Research in the Asia-Pacific Region”.

7. After a five-day discussion, the conference identified the following priority areas for Communications Research in Asia.

7.1 INSTRUCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

Research in this area is important because of the vast number of applications of communication and communication technology for instructional purposes. In several Asian countries, media are used for formal
as well as non-formal education. "Open" Universities have been established in a number of Asian countries. Educational Television is also being used in nearly all Asian countries. Media technology is applied for instructional and demonstration purposes in development campaigns at village level.

Projects which may be studied in this area are: Analysis of ETV (formal and non-formal) systems in selected countries relating to coordination, utilisation, and feedback; Principles and techniques of distance learning; Development teaching and training programmes in instructional communication and technology; and Feasibility/Application of low-cost media for instructional purposes.

7.2 MEDIA ECONOMICS

In view of the scarce resources of Asian countries, the relatively heavy investment in various media require justification and rationalisation especially where such expenditure has pressing alternative uses. Research can be done to improve the cost effectiveness of media. Some research questions which may be asked are as follows: Which of the media or media mix are most cost-effective for different purposes? What is an optimal investment strategy in the financing of communication technology? What is the economic trade-off between investment in communication as against other sectors, such as transportation?

Areas covered include: Alternative financial support systems for different media; Communication investment strategies among and between media; Production of media output: Economics of the communication/information media sector(s).

7.3 COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Increasingly rapid development of new communication technology and its fast rate of acceptance and change, have confronted developing nations in this region with new problems at various levels and in all aspects of life. This growth is expected to continue and will bring forth new problems which will need immediate solutions in the future.

Communications research is urgently needed to answer current pressing questions and anticipate developments to come. Among the priority areas are: Technology transfer; Implications of technology for interpersonal and mass communications; Social preparations for future trends in technology; Uneven and inequitable access to information due to disparity in technology; Social costs of technology; Appropriate and alternative technologies.
7.4 INSTITUTIONAL STUDIES

Communication institutions can be distinguished by several features: (a) the employment of technology; (b) the rapid production and management of creative material; (c) the demanding circumstances such as pressing deadlines.

Research on the influences and effects of these factors can help us understand and manage such institutions better. These studies can examine themes such as: decision-making processes; gate-keeping functions in the flow/refraction of information; influence of institutional cultures on media personnel and performance programme management.

7.5 COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

All Asian societies have adopted the goal of rapid socio-economic development. Most of them also exhibit an imbalance between urban and rural areas. Thus communications have been looked upon as a tool in engineering change, particularly in the rural sector.

Unfortunately, due to socio-economic disparities that exist in Asian societies, such efforts have not been informed by adequate knowledge of: (a) actuality of rural socio-economic conditions, and (b) processes of communication in rural areas.

Without such data, investment on social change becomes wasteful. The participation of 'actors' in the development effort is not obtained. Following are some of the areas that need to be researched further: Participatory modes of communication; Indigenous communications networks such as religious networks which affect rural behaviour; Social marketing techniques for development messages; Role of mass media as against other message systems in affecting behaviour in villages; 'Exposure limits' for media in rural societies; Social structural factors that affect the perception of developmental messages, particularly local stratification systems.

7.6 IMPACT STUDIES

The phrase impact study is used here deliberately to indicate that it denotes more than 'effects' study.

A large number of 'effects' studies, mostly correlating a few variables, have been done in the region. However, there remains the need to take a critical look at the strengths and weaknesses of these basic studies. They need to be collated, classified and codified so that theory, with predictive value, can be evolved.

At the same time, efforts should be made to fill gaps in existing research in this field and examine new aspects of impact studies.
Among areas which need investigation are: Relationship between communication processes and behavioural change, on the basis of integrative studies; Media content studies or critical analyses of various media "content" and their effect on individual behaviour; Differential impact of communications media; Multivariate studies; Studies on model or theory construction on media impact on development.

7.7 SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATIONS

An analysis of decision-making regarding research priorities, funding, utilisation of research and the relationship between researchers, policymakers, and value structures that impinge on such relationships, leads us to the area of the Sociology of Knowledge. This is an area which has not been examined at all in the Asian communications context. But priorities in seeking and using knowledge are related to so many sociological and cultural factors, particularly in an area so multi-faceted as Asia.

An examination of Asian communication research shows a lack of systematic studies on values affecting opinion, attitudes and perceptions, among decision-makers and researchers.

Areas of research may include: public opinion polls or attitude surveys of the sources and receivers of communication toward important national areas of concern; psychological studies of key personnel, collation, analysis and synthesis of existing research data on the subject; structural analyses; various modes of disseminating data; the flow of information from initial sources to receivers; utilisation of data by various intended levels of users.

7.8 COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

Communication occurs in a given culture. It has been shown to both affect media as well as be affected by media. Even so we see a trend towards mass cultures.

In Asia, very little research has been done in the area of communication and culture. A number of countries in the region are multi-lingual, multi-religious or multi-ethnic, which makes communication and its understanding more difficult. As the introduction of modern communication technology aims at bringing about social change, it is important to know what the media can do and cannot do in given social contexts.

Studies that should be done include: Profiles of potential audiences; Communications subcultures; Attitudes, beliefs, values of production personnel; Cultural autonomy; Cultural considerations influencing media production, dissemination and use.
8. The conference also referred to some general problems in the field of communications research. They were: (a) need for both applied and theoretical research in areas identified; (b) need for an interdisciplinary and holistic approach; (c) need for understanding of the priorities of policy-makers while, at the same time, insisting on the integrity and operational parameters of the researcher; (d) need for greater dissemination and utilisation of communications research.

9. A discussion was held regarding the role of AMIC in the area of communications research. The Secretary-General outlined some ideas regarding the future of AMIC. He emphasised: (1) building up of the documentation division of AMIC, including computerisation; (2) proposed links with 'centres of excellence' in the region; (3) need for greater utilisation of AMIC resources; (4) need to have Research Fellowships; (5) expansion of publication programmes, and (6) monitoring of AMIC activities.

10. The Secretary-General thanked the participants and observers for their cooperation and characterised the conference as a "very productive one". Dr Eapen and Mr Masood-Ur-Rauf on behalf of the participants thanked AMIC and the Secretary-General for arrangements made and for the achievements of the conference. Mr S M Ali endorsed these sentiments and reiterated his offer of assistance in following up on research proposals.

The conference closed on Friday, 21st May, 1982.

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