CHAPTER - 2
COMMUNICATION RESEARCH : THE MEANING AND THE NEED

In modern society “the mass media industries” have developed into highly significant institutions within various levels of society. We call them “Industries” because these mass media take up human, financial or material resources and in turn can be a most important factor in the economy of the country.

Decisions are being made daily throughout the world about media policies and programme output, but on what are these decisions based?

Halloran, in 1970 stated that “intelligent communication policies depend on the availability of information that only research could provide. This statement was part of a plea for more research and for the development of communication policies and related research policies. In spite of all these we are still very short of information that would provide a reliable base for policy formulation and decision making. In addition what little information we have is partial and unbalanced, we know far more about some parts of the world than others and far more about some aspect than others.

The present chapter deals with ‘what’ and ‘why’ of communication research i.e. what is communication research? and secondly what is the need for communication research in general and in developing countries in particular? To understand the meaning and definition of communication research we must first understand the meaning and definition of research in general.

MEANING AND DEFINITION OF RESEARCH

Research in common terms means a search for knowledge. Simply put Research is an endavour to discover answers to problems (intellectual and practical) through the application of scientific methods. It comprises defining and redefining problem formulation, hypothesis, suggesting solutions, collecting, organising and evaluating data, making deductions and conclusions to determine whether they fit the formulated hypothesis.

Research is classified into several categories namely:

1. Fundamental Research: The discovery of either a new theory or development of the existing theory.
3. Descriptive Research: It is a fact finding approach related to the present, portraying accurately the characteristics of a particular individual, situation or group.
4. Historical Research: This is the induction of principles through Research to the past and social forces, which have shaped the present.
5. The case study: A comprehensive study of a social unit – be it a person, a group, a social institution, a district or a community is called a case study.

Apart from the above there are several other kinds of research techniques which can be the combination of two or more than two of the above types.

All research therefore can not be divided categorically into the above mentioned categories, some can be a combination of two or even more than two of these research types or some may not even belong to any of the above categories very rigidly, depending on the subject and the subject matter.

To sum up therefore research is a careful search on enquiry into any subject matter which is an endavour to discover or find out valuable facts which would be useful for further application or utilisation.

THE CONTEXT OF MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Our modern society is constantly changing and the Mass Media supported by the society are also changing. In some places the process is reciprocal i.e. the society influences its media but the media once in place, modify the society. The media today is an important institution and take up human, financial and material resources and can be an important part of the economy of the country.

The changing technologies today bring about a change in the outlook among the users of the Mass Media thereby forcing innovations and changes in the policies of the Mass Media.

One of the most important things that research can do is to make the implicit explicit and make people aware of the nature and the implications of those basic assumptions which underlie their activities.

Thus we need the knowledge that only research can provide before we can develop adequate communication policies. These policies should be based on total knowledge i.e. on the operation of media in the wider social-economic-political setting, and on "public" needs rather than on "Partial" knowledge and "private" needs as is so often the case.

There should be no misinterpretation of communication policies. Instead of equating these policies with censorship or red tapism from top they should work at enhancing freedom of expression and promoting individual accessibility to the Mass Media which in turn would promote national development.

The so called 'communication research' should not restrict itself to economic, technological and ecological subjects only, they must also consider social, political and cultured factors for the policies on development programmes to be successful.

Thus a true understanding of the nature of research and its application calls for an understanding of historical, economic, political, organizational, professional, social, cultural and personal factors that impinge on the research process in so many ways.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCH TECHNOLOGY

Prior to the 1920s there was very little research on effects of mass communication within a scientific perspective. Though there was a great deal being written about the effects of media on the masses most of it was negative and was not based on a methodical scientific study of any kind. Gradually along with the development of social and behavioural sciences came the development of scientific methodologies and theory building strategies of communication research. These methodologies in turn rely heavily upon the strategies of physical and biological sciences.

The ability to do research on the effects of mass communication was of enormous importance in developing theories, to explain their role and significance in contemporary society. With the advancement of research techniques the experimenter came up with findings that measured the effects of mass communication in society.

Scientific research began in the late 1920s and most of them assumed that the media had the power to influence more or less every individual uniformly, but gradually this theory became obsolete when more advanced studies began. But all these theories have a certain amount of truth in them and cannot be rejected out right.

THE THEORY OF UNIFORM INFLUENCES

According to this theory:

1. The media present messages to the members of the mass society who perceive them more or less uniformly.
2. Such messages are stimuli that influence the individual emotions and sentiments strongly.
3. The stimuli lead individuals to respond in a somewhat uniform manner, creating changes in thought and action that are like those changes in other persons.
4. Because individuals are not held back by strong social controls from others, such as shared customs and traditions, the effects of mass communications are powerful, uniform and direct.

But gradually when reliable research findings began to accumulate, it had to give way to alternative theories of media effects. But the theory of uniform influences remained important because it provided a starting point for early research.

SELECTIVE INFLUENCE THEORY

It was later discovered that human nature was not uniform but psychologically dissimilar from one person to another because of the selective influence of learning in society.

According to the theory variations in habits of perceptions occur because each individual has a unique personal organization of beliefs, attitudes, values acquired through learning. But in spite of individual differences the
perceptions of individuals belonging to a specific social category are remarkably similar, though these might vary with factors such as age, sex, income, occupation etc.

In addition to these the amount of influence that media exerts on individual also depends upon his or her interactions with fellow individuals. The influence of media might be shaped or reshaped by the influence of a fellow media user whose views are stronger than the others.

Gradually it was realised that this theory was leading to a rootless, anonymous, differentiated and alienated social order.

THEORY OF INDIRECT INFLUENCE
The media by portraying a certain kind of image over and over again can establish new meanings, or stabilize the existing meaning of a particular concept and thus can have powerful indirect and long term effects. Thus a medium like television can by its continuous portrayals show us how to interpret such labels as “Women” or “Sexual attractiveness” or “social behaviour” and a host of other terms. It is difficult to assess the influence of media in this respect by one short survey, or even a content analysis of media messages. But it is in terms of such indirect and long term influences that the media exercise their greatest influence.

THE OBJECTIVE OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Communication research can show
How the media and the messages are distributed and used.
What are the main influences in the flow of information and opinion and which are the restraining factors.
What should be done to reach broader layers of population and how the development agents should approach these sectors.
How communication can be used for an effective two way flow of information.
It can show the ways in which communication can be activated in those sectors of society which are in greatest need of developing ‘impulse’ but are grossly neglected.

With the help of these information the Govt. can refine its national policies and can adjust its development plans and operations in a better way. Scientifically acquired knowledge can facilitate the formulation of appropriate communication policies and the development of institutions and practices directly related to the development needs.

WHAT KIND OF RESEARCH?
Communication research must rely on a wide variety of disciplines. We need research that studies the media and the communication process in general and also within the wider social, political and economic setting. Contributions should be made from different fields like psychology, sociology education, anthropology, economics literature and technology.
It should also be noted that research should be problem and policy oriented. Theoretical sophistication along with improved methodology is integral part of research procedure but the main emphasis must be directed towards the solution of social problems.

Communication research has mainly been lopsided in its subject matter, being mainly urban oriented. To overcome these problems new fields of research in communication are gradually being formulated. One of the new fields known as diffusion research takes communication research out of its narrow urban and media orientation and deals with problems in the rural areas concerning rural and agricultural development.

But again these kinds of research mainly focuses on diffusion of new technologies or material things like fertilizers seeds or technologies into the lives of common masses but not necessarily new ideas, new ideologies new social relations or the changing values.

Secondly diffusion research mainly focuses the flow of ideas from the developed to developing countries but generally overlook the reverse flow ie from east to west.

DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

"Development communication research is a fast growing but underdeveloped field of study " said Frederick T. C. Yu.

When we talk about communication research in developing countries we are talking about feedback Research: Feedback is intended to provide a flow of information about audiences and the effects of Mass Media to the programme and policy officers of the media and to the leader of national development.

The appropriateness of information directed to the audience of the Mass Media depends on appropriate information from and about the audiences of Mass Media. It must be based on facts, must allow the differences of opinions among a group of audience and change with time. This is where research feedback data is most useful.

Secondly any country cannot afford to waste resources on unsuccessful or inefficient campaigns. Research data provide information on the attitudes and prejudices of the audience. Their ways of thinking and social values are also focussed upon.

The research findings help to plan and execute a programme with success bringing about significant changes in attitudes and values towards the betterment of society.

Thirdly in any country there are many ethnic and socio cultural groups, but in a developing country the gap between the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the policy makers and the common masses are wider than the developed countries because of economic disparity. Most of the programme producers are trained in the Western school of thought. So they should make a constant effort to root themselves in the culture of their own
country, by visiting the audience and through constant research, only then can they make programs that are suitable for their kind of audience.

Lastly in a developing country the society and the media are changing constantly and is the duty of the researchers to keep the masses informed of the change that is happening around.

Thus caught up in simultaneous media change and social change, developing countries are discovering more and more the practical usefulness of research.

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Harold Lasswell described the sweep of communication research in terms of:

Who
Says what
In which channel
To Whom
With what effect

Who is the study of communicators and of communication organizations like mass media; what is the study of content of programmes that are broadcast or telecast on the media, channel refers to the study of different media for example what channels are used for a specific information to reach the village or what is the most effective combination of channels for a target audience.

Whom means the audience, their characteristic, needs, informations habits reactions to mass media, to development information and the like. Effect is basically what communication accomplishes; what audience remembers from it, what effect it has on attitude values & behaviour.

The end results however are not readily measurable in monitory terms. But only in development terms. Thus competent communications research can contribute to the efficiency of information and in turn to the pace & smoothness of national development.

RESEARCH ON WOMEN MEANING AND THE NEED

The Need

The effort to know something usually arises out of a need. Research on women therefore begin with the conviction that women's lot in society is not what it should be. There is a general assumption that women are being oppressed and discriminated. Therefore research on women cannot be neutral; its explicit purpose is to promote the interest of women. The aim of women's research is not to substitute women for men or alternatively to establish superiority of women over men but its main concern is to restore to half of humanity its rightful place in human society. To restore to women their humanity.

In other words research on women is about becoming aware of the situation of women, of the relation of women to the world, of the oppression and
discrimination to which women have been subjected and to use this as a power to change the situation.

One of the methods of carrying out this type of research is by reading of a text and by incorporating a woman's perspective to the text, which gives new meaning to the text.

Texts may be of different kinds like published literature, dramatic performance, paintings etc. They also include products of media such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio, serials films etc.

Our reading would consist in perceiving a perspective, which the text does not allow with a study of the gaps and silences. For example when a female victim of sexual harassment is projected on the media the importance is focussed on the violation of chastity but not as an act of violence causing physical and mental injury to the victim.

On the other hand how many women would speak out their experience after being sexually abused. Here it is not the text but the silence or the absence of text that must be explored.

Research on women not only explores the lack of women's perspective in the texts but also the attitude of women towards a specific social problem. Whether the woman propagates the age-old patriarchal values or has something radical of her own to contribute.

WHAT IS WOMEN'S STUDIES?

The essential components of research on women include:

1. Women's contribution to the social process.
2. Women's perception of their own lives, the broader social reality and their struggles and aspirations.
3. Roots and structures of inequality that lead to marginalisation, invisibility and exclusion of women from the scope, approaches and conceptual frame works of most intellectual enquiry and social action.

Narrowly speaking it is information about women as a critical instrument for social and economic development.

OBJECTIVES OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

1. To conscientise both men and women by helping them to understand, recognise and acknowledge the multi-dimensional roles played by women in society.
2. To promote better understanding of the process of social technological and environmental change.
3. To contribute to the pursuit of human rights.
4. To investigate the cause of gender disparities analysing structural, cultural and attitudinal factors.
5. To empower women in their struggle against inequality and for effective participation in all areas of society and development.

6. To render invisible women visible – in particular women of the underprivileged strata.

7. To help develop alternative concepts, approaches and strategies for development.

Thus research on women’s studies must be able to accommodate within its fold all types of work done by women in various sectors for development as well as their contribution to the family and society.

**RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN INDIA**

Research on women is not a very recent phenomenon. In fact there have been research studies focusing on women prior to independence mostly by social historians, Indologists, anthropologists and sociologists. The scholars generally glamorised the position of women during the Vedic period and tried to portray the deterioration in the status of women subsequently. They also examined various inhuman practices that affected the position of women.

During the post independence period up to the sixties the main focus on research on women was on women’s role within the family, in the society, or her relations to other social institutions.

If and when there were studies on working women they mainly focussed on the urban upper class females doing white collared jobs and these studies mainly focussed on the role conflict of women between her family and workplace.

But since 1970s research interest in women have not only changed and gained momentum but the stance and areas of research have also significantly changed.

One of the moving forces behind this sudden increase in the research concerning women was the publication of an investigation carried out by the Committee on the status of women in India (CSWI) in 1975. It was noticed that even after three decades of independence and planned development women’s position in the country was really very grim.

Women were found in the least paid jobs, working long hours and bearing full responsibility of household work. There was low political participation of women. This report for the first time shattered all set ideas and made some women question their own situation.

Thus there has to be a new approach in the research on women. Women’s studies have to start with the presupposition that there is gender discrimination in the society, women are considered inferior to men.

Secondly to get a deeper understanding of women’s issues we will have to make more and more use of experimental data from women’s lives which by definition would be subjective.
There is a need to develop a close contact between the academics and grassroots level workers.

Instead of using conventional classroom notes efforts will have to be made to use non-traditional material which will increase the understanding of the students as well as make them more sensitive towards the issue.

Further the study will have to be both for men & women. Women's studies should not be viewed as a separate discipline or a topic but has to be integrated into the discipline.

In fact women's studies have to be understood as an instrument for women's development and also as a necessary input to deepen the knowledge base of various discipliners.

EMPHASIS ON RESEARCH TILL 1975

The main emphasis of research prior to 1975 was on the woman's place in the society and its relationships within the society. These studies were mainly general and many of these were simplistic in nature. The women as an individual was seldom dealt with.

The economic position of women and the progress of women's education was also dealt with in the studies.

Education among women and for women have been considered an important area of discussion between 1961 and 1970 and this decade in general deals with women's studies in almost all its different aspects very extensively.

There was a noticeable gap in research on legal and political status of women, and in the area of art and culture. This goes to show that probably the legal and political status of women were not considered important by scholars and researchers and also her role in the economy and education were considered secondary to her role in the society. Woman as an individual was not important she was only seen as a part of the society.

RESEARCH AFTER 1975

The chart from 1980-88 shows that research on women and its emphasis has changed considerably after 1975. The main thrust of present research is regarding the economic status of women which includes employment, agricultural labour, workers in factories, and women and trade unionism. Problems of women in society and social conditions of women seem to have taken second place and general surveys are not in vogue any more. Legal and political status of women are being looked into and some very important researches have been done in the past decade. But most important are the new areas which have come into focus like:

Crime and Women, Religion, Medicine, Health, Child Care, Mass Media and Women etc.

Though the number of researches in these fields are negligible it is fortunate that these areas have been identified where a lot of work needs to be done.
With increasing thrust upon legal, political, and economic research on women, there may be a general upliftment of economic position in society, but unless education and health are promised to all women and proper legal and political status is given to them, economic status cannot be the only criteria for improving women's lives today. Similarly, crime against women and exploitation of women as sex objects in the mass media will not stop with better economic status alone.

Research in Women's Studies must consider women from all facets of life. It should help the decision-making machinery through research so that justice to women of all religious, age, caste, etc., can be done through the legal system.

**PROBLEMS OF RESEARCH IN WOMEN'S STUDIES**

1. Non-availability of research tools: Women's studies is a new multidisciplinary area of study where research is still in a very fluid state. The problem of non-availability of research tools is more acute in this discipline. Apart from books, reports, and articles in newspapers, etc., audio and audiovisual media are equally important research tools today. Lack of bibliographical control regarding both published materials in India and materials available in different libraries in India, hampers Indian research tremendously. This is more so in women's research because of its diversified multidisciplinary nature.

2. Lack of accepted methodology for research: Women's Studies in India owes its growth tremendously to a few committed individuals and occasional official patronage from national and international agencies. Methodologies for women's studies therefore often vary according to who is doing research and under which sponsorship.

3. Lack of communication regarding research activities is due to the following reasons:
   a) Difficulty in identifying the source which actually generate research materials in this area of study.
   b) Difficulty in identifying scholars and institutions who are involved in activities which generate research materials.
   c) The sudden increase in the number of institutions set up for different types of research in women studies.
   d) Increase in number of persons specialised in different disciplines who are now doing research in this multidisciplinary subject area.

4. Duplication in research: Due to the above-mentioned problems, one finds a lot of duplication in research in women's studies.

**GOALS OF WOMEN'S STUDIES**

1. The educational role of women's studies is its most important goal because it has an impact on change. Women can change their own lives and mobilise other women to change their position. This change can only be brought about by women and not by Govt. or by outside forces.
2. To change the nature of knowledge and what is being taught, all the disciplines should have a bigger view of the situation in every field.

3. The most important goal is to change the society and its values to bring about peace and to make this world a better place to live in. Women have some predilections to peace because of their different life experience and their nurturing roles.

4. Women doing women's studies should examine their own experience rather than studying other women's experience because there is an underlying commonality among all women.

5. The media can play a great part in shaping women's lives by giving more importance to their career and by stopping the projection of stereotyped women as sex objects of dull wit and low self esteem and thus help in the positive growth of women and development in all fields.

6. Women's studies should cross boundaries of countries and concern itself with the happenings in countries all over the world and see how they are trying to change the family structures and values.

To achieve these goals we need well balanced research in the field of women's studies and hence the need is:

1. To avoid sporadic and superficial research. Some institutions may specialise in certain aspects of women's studies so that there can be a joint planned effort to cover all important aspect of women's studies, this will naturally help in finding out the duplication in research as well as in filling up the gaps in research.

2. Methodology for research on women's studies may be spelt out by senior academics and committed scholars for the benefit of new research. Since following Western models and Western methods of research is not going to be very helpful in Indian context, a well thought out suitable methodology is needed and this must include both modern methods of research and traditional methods of data collection.

3. There should be a quantitative analysis on research already done. These are necessary for preparation of state of the art reports and trend survey reports.

Today women's studies have unfortunately gained a reputation as a soft area in research, a mere status symbol and a mode of getting easy finance and patronage. Unless academics are aware of the present trend of research it is not possible to plan for the future. Serious thought has to be given to planning and understanding the role of research in women's studies in the complete context of society and development.
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