

## DEBUNKING THE OLD AND THE NEW PARADIGM OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION: SETTING THE AGENDA FOR RESEARCH

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### Introduction

When Wilbur Schramm's book *Mass Media and National Development* appeared in 1964 it aroused a lot of enthusiasm in the social science community. The feeling at that time was that the book presented a complete explanation of the nature of development and of the role of communication in development. However, this enthusiasm proved to be short-lived; by the early 1970s it was found that the concept of development embodied in the book was limited and perhaps not entirely correct. Today, as Rogers (1976a: 121) says, "we see that past notions do not entirely fit the reality and potential of the contemporary scene."

This article examines the "rise and fall" of this enthusiasm. Specifically, it examines the premises of the old paradigm and contrasts them with some new alternatives. In the process, I will describe the "old" concept of communication in development and contrast it with some of the roles of communication in the new theories of development. Eventually what I hope to suggest in this article is that research in development communication must be refocused to integrate the changing vision of development as proposed by development scholars in other social science disciplines.

### The Dominant Paradigm

What does Rogers mean by "dominant paradigm"? It is essentially a model of growth. Some of its best-known early statements were in Lerner's *Passing of Traditional Society* and Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth*. Rostow sees modernization as a movement from traditional society through a point of "take-off" is a situation of self-sustaining growth. The basic economic index is GNP; social indices are urbanization, the development of communication systems, and the degree of political participation. Lerner sees a sequence of institutional developments leading to take-off: urbanization, literacy, the extension of mass media, higher per-capita income, and political participation (voting). The essential point is that growth in one of these spheres stimulates growth in others; all spheres of society move forward together toward modernization.

The tenacity of these assumptions gave rise to the concepts of "breakdowns of modernization" and "political decay" that appeared prominently in the early works of S.N. Eisenstadt (1964) and Samuel Huntington (1965). These assumptions have also influenced the analyses of the conditions under which these breakdowns and decays might occur. However, by the late 1960s this model of modernization began to crumble. The central focus around which criticisms emerged was the model's inability to explain the variable patterns of traditional societies, their internal dynamics, and their independent development of different political and economic complexes. This has also led Eisenstadt (1976:39) later to

conclude,

The myopia of developmental theorists, if not ideological, results from their tendency to view societies in static isolation without an adequate context in the international pattern of relationships.

### **Development Communication and the Dominant Paradigm**

How did this "dominant" paradigm see the role of communication in development? Reviewing the literature written by both advocates and critics, it is apparent that communicationists of development view their profession in high regard. In their own world, they see communication as having an important role in development, especially in conveying informative and persuasive messages from a government to the public in a downward hierarchical way. In the words of one of its proponents, "It was the pressure of communication which brought about the downfall of traditional societies" (Pye, 1963:3). According to the mainstream position, mass media are a kind of magic multiplier of development in developing nations.

Equipped with this vision of development and a belief in the positive role of communication in the process of development, communication scholars (particularly those from the United States) ventured around the world to look for such situations (i.e. where communication has a direct impact in the development process). The post World-War II period especially brought an increased need for agricultural production in third-world countries, and therefore for greater extension-service efforts. Naturally, the communication obsession was accompanied by a need to demonstrate effects, usually in such areas as agriculture, health, education, and other economic/service activities.

The strong influence exerted by U.S. scholars on communication research imposed a western outlook on communication flow in developing countries. The dominant paradigm was the "diffusion of innovation." In such research, according to Rogers (1976a),

an idea perceived as new by the receiver—an innovation—is traced as it spreads through a system. The innovation is usually a technological idea, and thus one can see that past diffusion research fits well with the dominant paradigm's focus on technology and on its top-down communication to the public.

There were other models used during the "reign" of the dominant paradigm (such as the information-seeking model and the two-step flow hypothesis) but they are less frequently tested.

To illustrate the influence of the diffusion-of-innovation model used in development communication research, we can examine the statistics. Although the origins of diffusion research may be traced to the German-Austrian and the British scholars of diffusionism in anthropology and to the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, who proposed the diffusion curve and the role of opinion leaders, the first known study was the hybrid-corn study conducted in Iowa in 1943.

According to Rogers (1976b:205), by 1952, over 100 diffusion researches had been

completed; by 1962, another 450; and by the end of 1974, another 1,200. By early 1975, 2,600 reports about diffusion innovations had been published, including about 1,750 empirical research reports and 850 other writings. Rogers (1973) reported that in India alone, 500 family-planning diffusion studies had been conducted. This model has also been extensively applied in Mexico, Costa Rica, Columbia, and Brazil (Beltran, 1976). Observing these statistics, Rogers (1976b:207) asserts that, "the amount of scientific activity in investigating the diffusion of innovations increased at an exponential rate (doubling almost every two years) since the revolutionary paradigm appeared thirty years ago".

As a result of these studies, the diffusion model came to be an accepted notion of how agricultural development occurs and how it can be promoted by government agencies. Heavy emphasis was placed on communication to disseminate (1) the information needed to evaluate and apply innovations and (2) the messages calculated to promote a readiness to consider change. The role of the mass media was stressed, resulting in a deluge of communication technicians, communication hardware, media campaigns, and training courses in development agencies all over the world. Observing this trend, Diaz Bordenave (1974:214) asserts that, "considerably more faith was put on the means of communication than on their content."

### **Critique of the Old Paradigm of Development Communication**

By the late 1960s and early 1970s the dominance of the diffusion of innovation model began to wane. It was subjected to much critical questioning. I believe this trend came about as a result of two related factors: (1) The internal weaknesses of the model itself, and (2) the reassessment by scholars of the meaning of development (or underdevelopment) and what it really means to people.

One main failing of this model is that it is insensitive to the contextual and socio-structural factors of society. This is especially obvious since one of the basic assumptions of the diffusion approach is that communication by itself can generate development, *regardless* of the economic and political conditions. To be sure, researchers have found that certain variables such as farm size, income level, social prestige, and so on, are positively and consistently related to the adoption of agricultural innovations. However, according to Cueller and Gutierrez (1971; cited in Beltran, 1976:20),

(Diffusion investigations) have not perceived the crucial influence of the general socio-structural situation that may lie behind these variables. Moreover, in spite of the fact that such variables were correlated positively with each other, diffusion researchers have failed to understand them as components of a far broader and more determinant factor: power structure of society. This factor .... is largely what defines who is an 'innovator' and who remains a 'laggard'.

Cueller and Gutierrez also contend that the diffusion model's concept confuses "leadership" with 'elite' or 'oligarchy.' The concept "cosmopolitanism," to them, could be construed as the connection of interests between rural and urban power-holders, and that the term "reference group" may serve to dilute the reality of 'internal domination' which

victimizes the peasantry (cited in Beltran, 1974:20). This view is supported by Felstehausen (1973:41) who says that

the roles and effect of communication is dictated by the larger structure ....  
The manner and rate with which new technology is adopted cannot be interpreted independently from the social and economic system where the technology is introduced.

Another limitation of the model, as pointed out by Kears (1976:167), is that it misconstrued the role of feedback. The model holds that a farmer rejects an improved practice either because the message is not sufficiently clear and persuasive or because the farmer is "not progressive." Feedback is used to modify messages, not programs. Kears laments that

little (is) done to encourage farmers to test recommended practice with the genuine intention of letting their experience exert an influence on practice recommendations, supporting institutions, or investments in research.

The heavy emphasis on mass media is also a weakness of the diffusion model. In developing countries, the use of mass media has to reckon with four limitations: availability (where rural populations are still without real access), access to messages (which follows the socio-economic stratification characteristics that prevail in those countries), message contents (which is usually oriented to the urban audiences that constitute the market), and message codes (which, again, corresponds to codes used by the urban audience). The problem is summed up by Fett (1974, cited in Kears, 1976:168):

Media are generally urban-centered. Media control tends to be in the hands of people with little understanding of and sometimes little sympathy for farm people and their problems. Even the media interested in agriculture tend to be more responsive to the concerns of agricultural supply industries, government officials in agriculture, and buyers of farm products than to the producer himself...

Finally, the most significant defect of the model is the epistemological orientation of diffusion-of-innovation research. This defect, which is related to the model's neglect of the contextual and socio-structural factors in society, comes in part from the notion that individuals can be viewed as an amorphous mass, and that mass media, virtually almighty, are able to mold people's behavior at will. Concomitantly, indiscriminate use of empirical research has been made in most of the diffusion studies.

Some studies aimed at showing what was overtly in the media, while others sought to capture what was covertly within the individual audience members. Or, to put it another way, one preoccupation was with the effects of the mass media on the individual's behavior, and the other with the functions of these media in society. Thus, as Beltran (1976:28) puts it, "derived from the mother social sciences, content analysis and sample survey through structured interviews came to constitute the basic methodological arsenal of most communicologists".

### Some thoughts about the new paradigm

The late 1960s and the 1970s witnessed a change in the orientation of social science with regard to the prevailing development paradigm. Specifically, several world events, coupled with intellectual criticisms, began to crack the credibility of the old paradigm. These events include a general disgust with environmental pollution, the world oil crisis, the opening of international relations with China, and the fact that development was not going on very well in developing countries. The basic tenets of "modernization" became the subjects of criticism in intellectual circles. The first challenge was to the dichotomy of "traditional" versus "modern" society as well as to Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth*. Second, the dominant paradigm was also challenged on the historical basis on which modernization is studied. In both cases, particularly among Marxist and neo-Marxist circles, the distinction between traditional and modern societies is criticized as a myopic view of a specific stage in the process of development. The scholars argued that these processes should be seen as parts of the historical expansion of capitalism and the subsequent establishment of an international system (imperialism) composed of hegemonous and dependent societies. Accordingly, the differences between modern and traditional societies exist in their relations to imperialism and colonialism, to exploitation and dependency.

Andre Gunder Frank, the most prominent of these scholars, holds that the historical context of the world system within which the underdeveloped countries have lived—and consequently the international structure of development—misrepresents the reality of the current transformations and future prospects of these nations. Frank (1967) argues that, as in any "advanced" societies, "traditional" societies do have entrepreneurship, specialization, and differentiation. But because of the intervention of western interests in their economies, many once-prosperous developing countries are now underdeveloped. Under existing trade relations between developed and developing nations the gap between the rich and poor is widening.

This new way at looking at development (and underdevelopment) shattered the whole idea of diffusion of innovation and the role of communication in the process of development. Scholars began to perceive the mass media in their nations as extensions of exploitative relationships with US-based transnationals. Elite ownership and control of the media were also questioned, as was the state's stress on their propaganda role. On the whole, the communications media were seen to operate primarily in one direction—from the top downward—and to serve the interests of those in power.

### Development communication and the new paradigm

Despite these criticisms, no new paradigm of development communication has emerged. What we have today are merely suggestions for alternative concepts. For instance, *network analysis* holds that human conduct has to be analysed not at the individual level but in the context of its socio-structural environment. Network analysis, according to Rogers (1976a:145) is a "type of research in which relational data about communication flows or patterns are analyzed using interpersonal relationships as the unit of analysis." There have been attempts to look at individuals in other contexts (such as the coorientation model, convergence model, general system approach, etc.).

Another suggestion has been to follow the path of self-development. In some countries (such as the People's Republic of China, Tanzania, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan), the main roles of communication in self-development can be summarized as (1) providing technical information about development problems, possibilities, and innovations in answer to local requests, and (2) circulating information about self-development accomplishments of local groups so that others may profit from their experience (Rogers, 1976a:141).

While these development may be seen as a step in the right direction, I believe that communication research should do more than examine the flow of communication in a village or district while ignoring the influence of the regional, national, and international events that influence the behavior of the population of this village or district. The task of communication scholars is to examine the role of communication from a broader perspective and to incorporate development issues that emerge from international and national scenes.

Furthermore, we need to be more critical in our endeavor; we need to move away from our bias toward preserving the mass media's current structures; we need to move away from what is called 'administrative' research to that anchored in theory. Therefore, I do not believe that the "new" paradigm of development communication represents an advance over the "old" paradigm.

In the first place, there is no "new paradigm of development communication". Network analysis and the other orientations suggested by Rogers (1976a:138 ff) are an advance, *but not a significant departure* from the "old" paradigm. Thus, it is incumbent on my part to put forward some possible issues that communication research should be geared to, issues that should fit neatly into the current debate in development paradigms. The following discussion identifies some of those issues.

### Setting the agenda for development communication research

In the mid 1970s, communication scholars (particularly those working in the realm of Marxist theory) began to be sensitive to the radical orientation of other disciplines such as sociology and political science. The change began (to my knowledge) with an article written by Dallas Smythe (1977) in which he laments the lack of sensitivity to the significance of communications. Smythe's work has activated some debate because of his materialist emphasis on the audience as the major commodity of the capitalist communication industry. It perturbs other radical authors by concentrating on the oral, written, and pictorial themes of cultural communication.

There are other works that attempt to link social structure and social change to mass communication. Among these is a volume edited by McAnany, Schnitman and Janus (1981). Allow me to elaborate on two of the chapters in this volume: one written by James Halloran ("The Context of Mass Communication Research") and the other by Vincent Mosco and Andrew Herman ("Radical Social Theory and the Communication Revolution"). They illustrate what I believe to be a significant departure from the existing orientation of development communication research.

In his overview of mass communication research particularly in the United States, Halloran criticizes its orientation as essentially responding to the requirements of a modern, industrial, and urban society for empirical, quantitative, policy-related information about

media operations.

On the whole, research was carried out with a view to improving the effectiveness of the media, often regarded simply as objects of study or as "neutral tools" in achieving stated aims and objectives, often of a commercial nature (p. 24).

Labelling it "conventional research" (which he defines as "research having a mainly value-free, positivistic, empiricist, behavioristic, psychological emphasis") Halloran emphasizes that research anchored in conventional orientation is usually centered on the media rather than the society, and that

theory was neglected and the media were not seen in relation to other institutions. There were few, if any, questions about power, organization, and control, little reference to structural considerations, and only attempts to study the social meaning of media in historical or contemporary contexts (p. 24).

Halloran suggests that instead of using conventional research, contemporary and future mass-communication research should be critically oriented: first, such research must deal with communication as a social process; second, it must study media institutions not in isolation but with and in terms of other institutions, and within the wider social context (national and international); and third, it must conceptualize research in terms of structure, organization, professionalization, socialization, participation and so on.

Although Halloran's work provides a new line of thinking, he fails to suggest what issues we need to focus on and be "critical" with. This deficiency is rectified in the next chapter in the volume, written by Mosco and Herman. Taking a cue from other disciplines, particularly sociology, Mosco and Herman suggest that communication research should be organized into four areas: (1) communication and the world capitalist system, (2) mass communication and the capitalist state, (3) communication control in the contemporary labor process, and (4) mass communication in leisure time and private life. In addition, Mosco and Herman assert that they view dialectical as a central concept linking these four areas,

that is, the communications revolution is shaped by regional and class struggles, by powerful capitalist forces molding the revolution to meet accumulation and legitimacy needs, and noncapitalist-forces resisting hegemony and using information resources to build a new social order (p. 59).

Let us now consider the specific communication issues available for research in the areas identified by the authors. (In this discussion, however, I shall concentrate on only three of those areas). Within the framework of the *world capitalist system*, there is a need to study the context within which the communication infrastructure provides a basis for global capitalist accumulation, repression, and legitimization. From this standpoint, we need to ask: Who owns and controls these networks? What are their ties to other global capitalism?

“Answers to the questions would tell us more about the contemporary press than a score of studies on press than a score of studies on press `objectivity’” (p. 61).

If we examine the role of communication within the framework of capitalism as a world system’s numerous contradictions. In other words, to what extent is the world capitalist system a function of regional struggles that are creating the conditions for changing the system? In coming to grasp with the problem, the authors examine the role of some semiperiphery countries (Mexico and Brazil in Latin America, Italy in Europe, and Thailand in Asia) in international communication. These countries, they argued, are becoming regional controllers or go-betweens in the flow of communication from the core. This development has led certain analysts to see an end to cultural imperialism, but in fact, semiperiphery countries get most of their information sources from the core or, at least, model their systems after core media and telecommunications. This represents a change but certainly not the demise of the world information order.

In their analysis of the role of communication in the *capitalist state*, Mosco and Herman suggest that research endeavor should strive to understand how the ruling-class and the state control information resources to mediate the diverse interests of the society. In the United States, one way is to examine how interest groups pursue their ends through the committees of Congress, executive departments, and regulatory agencies.

For example, we need detailed critical studies of how AT &T has put together and operates its nationwide local or, dare we say ‘grass-roots’ lobbying organizations, how the National Association of Broadcasters uses its power over political image-making to maintain private conglomerate control of the airwaves....Another approach is essentially the reverse, focusing on a regulatory agency such as the FCC, congressional bodies such as the House and Senate Communications Subcommittees of their respective Commerce Committees, or an executive agency like the National Telecommunications and Information Administration in the Commerce Department (p. 66).

The above is essentially an instrumentalist view of the role of the state; Miliband being a major proponent.

From the structuralist perspective (of Polantzas and Gramsci), we can similarly examine the role of the state not so much in terms of how the ruling class controls the information resources but why, or in terms of the vital repressive, accumulative, legitimative functions that the capitalist state strives to fulfill. According to the structuralist perspective, the ruling class needs the state to ensure that the vital functions of accumulation, legitimation, and repression are satisfied (thus meeting the needs of capital). The role of communication research in this area is to examine how this is fulfilled. From the standpoint of linking communication to the control over the labor process, Mosco and Herman said that

today’s computers are central to (what Richard Edward calls) “technical control” of the labor process. In his recent work on class struggles over the labor process, Edward points out how several large firms have established elaborate feedback systems consisting of a computer hierarchy with an IBM 370 at its apex. These systems have the potential to control evaluating

work. Such information technologies provide capital with new dimensions of control over labor process (p. 73).

Arguing along this line, the authors suggest that contemporary and future communication research should examine and understand the realms of the class struggle within the dynamics of international domination and state power. Such examination should not only reclaim the workers's history but should also develop a theory and practice for the present.

How can workers once again use (information) resources not just for resistance, but to build alternative work structures that are liberating rather than oppressive? This involves a number of strategies. One is to detail the forms of resistance that workers are now using to oppose the oppressive use of information technologies and the centralization of control over communication in the workplace...Furthermore research is needed on how popular media represent the workplace and its combatants both individually....and collectively in their respective organizations? (p. 74).

In short, communication research should examine how workers can counter the "hegemony" of the capitalists in their workplace.

In their conclusion, Mosco and Herman express their optimism for the emergence of a radical agenda in communication research. They support this by saying that the recent resurgence of radical and neo-Marxist research on global capitalism, the capitalist state, and its labor process offers many useful lines of inquiry that communication research can pursue. In addition, these issues

represent a potent theoretical force to counter the dominance over the field of communication research of such conservative perspectives as developmentalism, pluralist functionalism, utopianism about the post-industrial information society, and elitism about the mass society (p. 78).

## Conclusion

I share this optimism. Communication as an academic discipline is actually a "multi-disciplinary" enterprise. It has attracted scholars from other disciplines inasmuch as its discourses are influenced by those disciplines. If diffusion of innovation is very much influenced by the developmental thoughts of other disciplines (particularly sociology and economics) I do not see why communication cannot shift as the thinking in other disciplines shifts. If sociology, political science, and economics can move from the conventional thought of the 50s and 60s to the more radical thoughts of the 70s and 80s, why not communication. Somewhere along the line, we need to look at the role of communication and communication research along the lines of what Halloran, Mosco, and Herman are suggesting.

As once exhorted by Murdock and Golding that we need a professional specialization in the sociology of mass communication, I am now also inclined to suggest that development communication should also be studied within the sociological milieu. Even-

nally, research in this field can, as Murdock and Golding (1979:12) put it for the sociology of mass communication,

address itself to the central problem of explaining how radical inequalities in the distribution of rewards come to be presented as neutral and inevitable and are understood as such by those who benefit least from this distribution. In short...communication should be incorporated into the wider study of stratification and legitimation.

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