Where Is Mass Communications Research Going?

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First Draft

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Prepared for The Conference on "Communications Research: What, Why and How?" at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University, December 6-8, 1985.

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Forecasting is a risky business, but it can be fun. There is a ~~special~~ foolhardiness in accepting an invitation to predict where mass communication research is going. But the invitation activates one's Walter Mittyism, the dream that one may even ~~discover~~ discovered a brave new world of mass communication research. And so we proceed down the road from forecast to fantasy.

I approach this assignment with three assumptions. First, mass communication research, like all fields of study, is defined by what it does; its future will be decided by what problems it will study, how it will study them, and what it will learn. Second, what ~~will happen in~~ becomes of this field of study will depend more on what will happen in the media ~~and related academic disciplines~~ and on what the media and society will do to each other than on what has happened in the academic communication research institutions. Third, the study of mass communication presents a special problem that is in need of rethinking. We have entered an unprecedented era of explosive technological developments and continuing social changes. Accelerating advances in the field of communication and information are

changing not only the mass media but also the way we communicate, work, live and organize our society. These developments and changes raise important questions about many of the ideas, methods and institutions that have guided the study of mass communication during the past 30 to 40 years. They present exciting opportunities and pose enormous challenges for mass communication researchers.

Obviously, we should have a good understanding of what is going on in this field before we can speculate on where it is going or suggest where it should be going. This is easy to say but difficult to do. Mass communication research has grown so fast and expanded into so many specialties in so many directions that it is very difficult to get a clear and complete picture of the entire field. Even researchers have trouble keeping track of developments within their own specialties. Just how many specialties and sub-specialties are there in this field? How many and what kind of researchers are doing how much and what kind of research about what kind of problems in what kind of institutions? We don't really know.

Some of these specialties, such as consumer and opinion research, have acquired an identity of their own. Some, such as advertising research, started long before mass communication became a subject of study. Some emerging specialties, such as communication policy research, are barely recognizable. Of course, not all specialties are equally productive. Those with larger

Take this vast proliferated area of international communication research, for instance. Ithiel de Sola Pool observed not very long ago:

> There is, in fact, remarkably little research of any kind of international communication. There is a great deal of essay writing about it. But by research I mean studies in which data is collected to establish or refute some general proposition...
>
> The two topics regarding international communication that have been most extensively studied, and very badly, I must say, are the balance in the flow of communication among countries, and the cultural biases in what flows. Those are topics on which there have been a few empirical studies, though by far the great bulk of that literature consists of polemical essays unenlightened by facts.[1]

Pool illustrated this point with the book, National Sovereignty and International Communications edited by Kaarle Nordenstreng and Herbert Schiller. He went on:

> ... not one of the papers was a research study of the kind that social scientists normally do. A couple of the papers reviewed some social science literature and cited empirical examples, but use of social science or quoting of empirical data is not the same thing as doing research. I say this not to claim that every book is obligated to be a social science research study; there are other legitimate activities in the world too. But I cite this book since most of us authors are social scientists, and it is, I fear, typical rather than exceptional in the literature about international communication.

There are good reasons for us to focus our attention on what prominent researchers such as Pool considered to be serious and solid international communication research by social scientists -- i.e. carefully designed research projects on well defined international communication problems, carefully stated concepts and theories, and carefully tested propositions and findings about such problems, and not simply opinions, insights and advice of social scientists. There are equally good reasons to believe that Pool's definition covers only one type of research and that international communication research -- or mass communication research for that matter -- is by no means limited to social science research.

Much of the talk about mass communication research dwells on the work of a special group of academic communication scholars. Most of them teach in communication departments or journalism schools, direct graduate communication programs, supervise doctoral dissertations in communication, and publish in communication journals. This is a fast-growing community. In the days of what Wilbur Schramm calls the "Founding Fathers" of mass communication research, only a handful of communication doctorates were awarded in any year. In 1984, according to the Journalism Educator (Spring, 1985), 540 doctoral students were enrolled in U.S. departments and schools of communication and journalism. Minnesota headed the list with 50 students in its doctoral program, but Iowa and South Illinois graduated the most doctorates, each reporting eight in 1984.

In the 1940s and 1950s, only a handful of communication journals existed. Schramm[2] counted about 50 in 1983. In the 1940s, the annual publication of journal articles and books was a little more than a hundred. In 1982, according to Schramm, "a thousand articles and book chapters were summarized at length in a single quarterly publication called Communication Abstracts, and these were chosen selectively rather than inclusively."[3]

It is hard to characterize these academic mass communication researchers and still harder to determine their role in mass communication research. They are growing perhaps faster in number than in status. They are distinguished perhaps more by what they are than what they do. Because of their positions, they probably play a more important role in journalism education than mass communication research. Most of them are products of graduate programs in communication and journalism, although a significantly large number of them are trained in social sciences and related disciplines.

They seem to operate in a world of their own. They establish their own journals, organize their own associations, and publish in their own journals or yearbooks. They have become increasingly more independent from various academic disciplines and related professions and, at the same time, more isolated.

Schramm, who knows the work of this group of researchers better than most students of mass communication research, observed recently that the fast rate of growth of this group "is at once reassuring and worrisome," because "it is inevitable in a field developing as fast as this one that a great deal of trivia and a relatively small proportion of truly insightful research will be published."[4]

Jeremy Tunstall, a noted British media sociologist, has a more critical view of U.S. mass communication research. He probably had these academic communication researchers in mind when he wrote that "something is badly wrong with U.S. communication research," and that "the symptoms include too much low-quality work and very little, if any, work of really high quality." The "central disease," to him, is fragmentation. He went on:

> ... The fragmentation that is U.S. communication studies takes many forms. I believe the central mistake was to have a discipline on a combination of practical journalism and social psychology. The fact that a single individual can teach courses in, say, magazine editing and research techniques in social psychology is a tribute to human adaptability, not a well-conceived academic discipline.
>
> Once a field becomes fragmented and acquires a reputation for low-quality research, it becomes hard to attract or retain people of the highest quality. The old pattern of the researchers passing by, but not staying, will continue. In such a fragmented field, reputation is also fragmented -- in other words, even if you do superior work, the quality may not be recognized.[5]

This is not a new criticism of mass communication research. The field has received even harsher criticisms not only from social scientists but also from scholars in other disciplines, professionals in the media and journalism educators. Among the familiar criticisms: much communication research lacks direction, much of it is neither intellectually exciting nor socially useful, and it neither commands very high respect in the academia nor enjoys wide support from the profession of journalism.

But to be fair to academic communication researchers we should set the record straight and make two important points. One, their work constitutes only one part of this vast and still largely uncharted filed of mass communication research. Two, their research environment is quite different from what it was 30 or 40 years ago.

Many scholars (not just social scientists) and writers who work on mass communication problems are not associated with communication departments or journalism schools and do not consider themselves mass communication researchers. They work in academic departments in universities, news media, advertising agencies, consumer research companies, opinion research and survey centers, consulting firms, government offices and world organizations. Some publish in journals of their academic disciplines and some in trade organs. Some do research for their clients. Many are in mass communication research as a business.

The emerging communications policy research, for instance, is a fragmented preserve of disparate experts. Researchers in this new specialty carry very different tool bags that are arbitrarily filled with instruments and instructions from law, economics, engineering, political science, sociology and business. Not many conventional mass communication researchers have entered this area. A leading scholar in this area was Pool. But he was no conventional communication researcher. Another important figure in the field is Edwin Parker, formerly of the Institute of Communication Research at Stanford. He has left the academia.

When Paul Lazarsfeld entered mass communication research, he introduced survey research to the field. He founded one of the most influential survey research organizations in the country, the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, and he trained many outstanding communications research scholars. Then came the Survey Research Center at Michigan and the Social Science Research Center at Chicago. During those early days of communication research, survey research had a special place of importance in graduate communication programs and opinion research was one of the first areas of communication research to attract media attention and media support. Much of Lazarsfeld's research at Columbia, for instance, was supported by CBS. Some of the early public opinion polls were conducted by university researchers. Today, a great deal of survey reserach is done by media organizations themselves and some can be bought from commercial research firms such as Yankelovich. The polls of CBS and the

New York Times have become a regular operation. More than one hundred survey centers are based in universities and, according to Eleanor Singer, editor of the Public Opinion Quarterly, at least 100 media organizations have their own research units.

Survey research, of course, continues to be a major research method and tool of academic communication researchers. But they do not monopolize this method or tool, which is used by many other researchers in many fields for many reasons. And they do not always get the support they need to do as much of the type of research as they wish to do.

In 1959, when mass communication research was still a relatively new field of study, Berelson wrote that "the state is withering away."[6] In 1972, about 13 years later, Gans wrote about "the famine in mass communication research,"[7] although in 1983, eleven years later, he talked about "the study of news and the news media" as "one of the liveliest fields within communication research."[8] Berelson's idea was that the so-called "Founding Fathers" were leaving the field. He wrote that "Lasswell was interested in political power, Lewin in group functioning, and Hovland in cognitive processes, and they utilized this field (communication) as a convenient entry to these broader concerns." He said Lazarsfeld was the only one of the four who "centered on communication problems per se," but Lazarsfeld was then moving away into mathematical sociology. Schramm described the state of affairs in those early days with

that much-quoted statement that communication research was "an academic crossroad where many have passed but few have tarried."[9] Schramm now sees things a little differently. He now speaks of communication research as "a new academic oasis"[10] where a new type of research scholar has moved in and settled down. "Many of the new settlers," Schramm writes, "came equipped with brand new Ph.D.s in communication and gave every indication that they intended to spend their careers in the new academic oasis." But Schramm wonders whether the new settlers could really build something stable except upon the foundation of an old and honored discipline. And he asks: "Could a new scholarly discipline grow up around the problems of communication, or was this merely a passing fancy among academics?"

Perhaps the metaphors of "an academic crossroad" and "a new academic oasis" are not quite appropriate. To begin with, both suggest a place, something spatial and stationary. A map of mass communication research does not yet exist. But if one were to draw such a map, this "crossroad" or "oasis" would be just a spot or region on this map. Secondly, it is hard to picture communication research as an "oasis" which is defined in dictionaries as "a fertile or green area in an arid region" or "something providing relief from boring or dreary routine." To be sure, many settlers -- those new Ph.D.s in communication -- have moved in to settle down, but some settlers do move on to other regions that are perhaps even greener and

Perhaps we should look at mass communication research simply as a field of study, something like the study of international relations or area studies. It can be compared with the study of engineering, medicine, law, business, technology, or environment. It requires the work of scholars of many skills from many disciplines.

It is perhaps more fitting to think of mass communication research as a caravan on an intellectual expedition than as a spot or region on an academic map. This caravan has traveled some distance. It has traversed many crossroads. It is now at another crossroads. It has to know where it is going and where it should be going.

We can answer the two questions by raising two other questions: One, what problems are likely to be studied? Two, what problems should be studied?

We know some answers to the first question. We can expect more research on most of the problems in the field. Every specialty in mass communication research has its research agenda. Certain problems are the main concerns of certain specialties, and some specialties are more concerned with methodological than substantive problems. There was a time, for instance, when advertising and commercial research was confined to newspapers, magazines and radio and much of the research had to do with the learning and forgetting of advertising

messages. Then television developed and introduced changes in research. And new media of advertising created still more changes. But the measurement of advertising effects remains to be the main concern of this specialized area of research. "The agenda of unanswered questions in advertising and commercial research," Bogart noted in 1973, "continues to remain almost identical with those that face the academic student of communication and persuasion."[11]

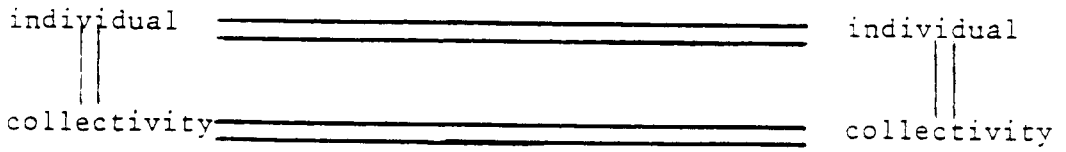
Opinion research, which deals with all kinds of opinions that can be measured, is always concerned with measurement techniques and methodological problems. It seeks constantly to develop new and better methods of opinion and survey research. For instance, when AAPOR (American Association of Public Opinion Research) and WAPOR (World Association of Public Opinion Research) meet for their joint convention next year, high on their agenda will be, as always, problems of methodological developments. They are now calling for papers that will deal with validation studies (comparison of surveys and other measurement techniquest for determining TV ratings; readership; trends in the economy; etc.); indirect survey estimation techniques (randomized response; normative techniques; shadow weights); experimental design (studies of response rate and question wording); telephone interviews (how to get more out of the technique, compromises vs. innovations in telephone survey design); developments in the design and use of mail surveys;

qualitative research techniques; finding and questioning rare and hard-to-reach populations (the homeless, millionaires, low incident product users); mathematical models of public opinion dynamics; new developments and applications of choice models (treatment of uncertainty, variety-seeking, etc.); physiological measurement techniques; and popular culture as an indicator of public opinion. There will also be papers on professional developments and concerns of public opinion researchers: for instance, the problems of research and the law (researchers as expert witnesses; conflicts faced when research findings are used for advocacy); research entrepreneurs (the academic as research entrepreneur; and research as a business); pending legislation which will affect survey research; and critical decisions based on survey research (case histories in marketing, elections, public policy).

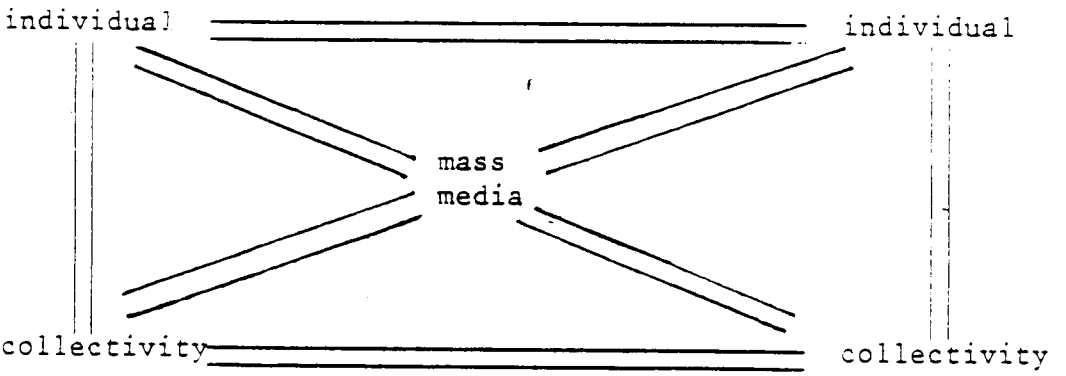
Instead of considering research concerns of various specialties, let us look at the entire field of mass communication research and ask: what ideas and problems should be called onto the research stage?

Twelve years ago, W. Phillips Davison and I organized a research conference to ponder the same question.[12] We produced a volume on the major issues and future directions of mass communication research with contributions by Ben H. Bagdikian, Jay Blumler, Leo Bogart, Davis B. Bobrow, Michael Gurvitch, Herbert Hyman, Elihu Katz, Daniel Lerner and Edwin B. Parker. Our guiding question was: What kinds of knowledge are necessary if societies are to make rational decisions regarding the organization and operation of the mass media? We raised several complexes of questions for research: What social and individual needs can the mass media help to satisfy? What is the preferred relationship, for each society, between masss communication and interpersonal channels? What types of media and content are best suited to what kinds of task? How can standards of mass media performance be defined? How can the media confer the greatest benefits at the lowest cost? These questions remain as important and almost as fresh as the day they were proposed 12 years ago.

Davison and I found it necessary to structure the field of mass communication research in order to identify the principal areas for research and the principal tasks of researchers. We started with a simple model of communication in society. It's a model that links individuals and collectivities in two-way communication channels as follows (the two lines indicate two-way communication):



We then added the mass media, which introduced new dimensions in this model as follows:



This is a model that links mass media with individuals and with collectivities, indicates certain basic processes of communication and presents three principal areas for research: (1) relationships between the individual and the mass media, (2) relationships between social organizations and the mass media, and (3) the way these relationships interact with communication mechanisms and technologies to result in the formation of particular types of message content.

This model remains useful today as a device to indicate the types of precesses or relationships in which the mass media are involved, to see how much and what mass communication research has learned about what kinds of processes or relationships, and to suggest what research is needed to improve our understanding of other processes

What sort of problems should be on the agenda for future research? The following are proposed as starters.

Let's start with the basic: the U.S. media system.

The problem: what kind of media system do we have in the United States? How well is this system meeting individual and societal needs and how would it serve these needs better?

These are several sets of specific questions to be explored:

How is this system structured now? How does it function? How has this system changed? What has changed over the last few decades? What is changing?

Who owns what in this system? What is the pattern of media ownership? How is the pattern changing? Who are the new owners? What does it take to own what in this system? How are investments in media related to other investments in the financial community? What determines how media profits are reinvested in the system or in other enterprises? What do we know about the joint ventures, mergers, takeovers and new services?

Who runs what in the system? And how? What new knowledge do we need about media management and media operations?

How do the changes in the three main areas of the system -- information, entertainment and advertising -- converge and have what effect on the system?

Who (individuals and organizations) wants, needs, gets and used what this system has to offer?

What is the role of the system in the shaping of values and behavioral patterns? What do we know about the communication of values?

What do we know and what should we know about the various types of media workers, their performance and their problems? How is their performance evaluated? How should it be evaluated?

What is the impact of technological changes on the system? What are the directions and dimensions of these changes?

What is this system doing to and for our political, economic and cultural environments, and how in turn is it shaped or reshaped by these environments?

What is the role of this system in the world society?

Who can do what to make this system work better and be more responsive to people's needs?

A critical test of how well we study and understand a system is our ability to predict or forecast its behavior. For instance, understanding the atmospheric and solar system enables meteorologists to make weather forecasts and to predict such happenings as sunrises, eclipses and comets. Similarly, understanding the political system and voting process allows pollsters to make election forecasts. While meteorologists and pollsters do not always make accurate forecasts, they have made progress in their studies, developed better tools and techniques and improved their ability to predict. We are still a long way from completely

understanding our media system and we don't know nearly as much as we should about it to attempt much significant forecasting. Americans know many things and have even very definite ideas about different parts of this system, but not many of them understand the system as a whole. The subject has not even received much serious attention from media researchers. Conventional communication researchers are still concerned mainly with specific topics of the Lasswellian who-says-what-in-which-channel-to-whom-with-what-effect question. They seem to be much more interested in how people in a nation behave in a media system than what a nation could or should do with its media system. Many parts of this system are heavily studied by some specialists and are widely debated at different forums. Some studies explore one medium such as public television, while others examine one kind of content such as TV sex or violence, some analyze one kind of coverage such as foreign news, and some aim at discerning one or another of the particular effects of one kind of news or advertising on one kind of consumer or one part of a community. But systematic inquiries into the entire media system are rare.

On the other hand, is it really important to study the entire media system? Is it really necessary to predict its future? Who really knows what the system will look like 30 or 40 years hence? How predictable was our present media system 30 or 40 years ago? Who would have predicted 40 years ago, at the end of World War II, an American media system that includes such outlandish things as television, 24-hour cable TV news, videodisc, video cassette recorders, teletext, videotext, subscription TV, direct broadcast satellites, etc.? Who would have forecast an information environment that is made up of such fanciful things as microwaves, laser beams, data bits, microcomputer chips, satellites, digital wires, fibre optics, memory banks, word processors, personal computers, teleconferencing, teleshopping, telebanking and tele-almost-everything?

An obvious answer to these questions is that forecasting is inherent in all system evaluations and public policy research. A somewhat less obvious but equally important answer is the premise that the media system we will have depends to a certain extent on what we desire, demand or do. Forecasting the future of our media system is not quite the same as predicting tomorrow's weather. Meteorologists may predict tomorrow's weather accurately, but they can't really do anything about it. Our forecast of the media system may be nowhere near as certain, but we can do something about it. Obviously, the system may not always go the way we desire or want. But the emphasis is on thinking ahead, on knowing the options, and on making policies and plans. And this is where

To ask how the media system is meeting our individual and societal needs and how it would serve these needs better is to evaluate the performance of the system and to recommend ways for its improvement. We are in effect asking: Is the media system doing what it is supposed to do and working as well as it is supposed to work? We do not have many evaluative standards and tools for answering this question. Indeed we do not even agree on ways to arrive at standards. Journalists receive prizes and awards for their good work. They know the elements of journalistic excellence but they cannot always explain to outsiders what these elements are. This is an area where social scientists and journalists run into some predictable troubles when they discuss communication research on journalistic performance. Gans,[13] for instance, talks about "an urgent 'in house' task for news policy research: the development of criteria for judging and evaluating the news," because all too often the judgements of news researchers tend to reflect "criteria and standards of one or another version of the scientific methods which, "cannot be the only, or even the major, standard setters for journalism." Gans thinks that news media researchers with an interest in policy must begin to propose and discuss other norms with which to evaluate the news. This is, of course, a very difficult venture. On the other hand, to quote Gans again, "only if we give serious and systematic thoughts to news norms and news media purposes do we have the right to tell journalists and others whether and how to improve the news."

It is all very easy to ask: how well is the media system meeting the needs of our society and how would it serve these needs better? The question cannot be answered now because we have yet to have a clear understanding of how these needs are perceived by those in the media, and how the media system functions in the total information environment. Most media studies offer one-dimensional or slanted views on this environment and this system. Not many studies examine the way in which people use all channels of information and and entertainment available to them and how they compare, integrate, weigh and recall information and entertainment from multiple sources. We know that information, entertainment and advertising grow together in this system, but how the three functions interact is dimly understood and little studied. Research on news media rarely deals with entertainment, few studies of entertainment have much to do with information, and advertising researchers concentrate on doing their own thing. Consider, for instance, a few television programs. Such early network programs as ABC's Good Morning America and CBS Morning News have news and information as their basic text and format, but use many show-biz techniques in presentation. On the other hand, such entertainment shows as "That's Incredible" and "Real People" are sometimes very informative indeed. Home video cassette recorders have changed the way many families spend their leisure time with television

and other media. They have given rise to a new industry, led television networks to consider new programming services and encouraged more making and viewing of home movies. The claims of telephone and computer companies to enter the "information business" and the "knowledge business" are not just cute or empty advertising slogans. But how do all these fit into the media system?

Pool, one of the most respected and reflective men in communication research with a strong interest in information technologies, looked at the challenge for research and wrote not very long ago:

> If there is to be a new wave of exciting research on communication, it is likely to be on new questions made salient by drastic changes in the communication situation. While we can expect to make some marginal progress in understanding the effects of the mass media, I see no reason to anticipate a major breakthrough in this area. But new technologies raise different questions than do the mass media. For example, because mass media are one-way, controlled by a small population of producers and consumed in the same form by millions of people, we are naturally curious about the 'effects' of such heavy stimuli.
>
> ...But this is not the salient question to ask about an information retrieval system. If people have access to an enormous range of information and are able to choose what they want out of it, they may have all sorts of problems in skill and motivation in finding just what they want, but no one is telling them what ought to be heard or seen. This situation makes the user more interesting than the effects of the messages on that user. We are likely to see interesting research being done on people's motivation to seek knowledge, on their styles of search, on their gains of knowledge, and on their creativity in learning, as well as on how they interact with one another when each retrieves different information.[14]

To understand the impact of technological changes on the media system is a much trickier research problem than we generally realize. Parker alerted us to one aspect of this problem during the early years of communication policy research:

> Much research needs to be done to bring to fruition the social potential of the new communication technology and to determine the possible benefits and dangers before the technology has been widely adopted. The major studies of the effects of television (Himmelweit, Oppenheim & Vince, 1958; Schramm, Lyle and Parker, 1961) were completed after television had been widely diffused through the society. This was some twenty years after the television became publicly available. By the time the studies were completed, it was too late to change the technology; and, at least in the United States, too late to change the economic and regulatory structure of the television industry in anything except very minor ways.[15]

Parker made this point even more sharply in another piece:

> If we structure the problem (of technology assessment) as one of assessment of the technology itself, or as one of the developing social indicators to better measure social effects after they have ahppened, then the battle will have been lost before we start. By the time we have definitive measures of social effects, the political, economic, and institutional structure surrounding the new technology will be well entrenched and highly resistant to change.[16]

Pool was talking about another aspect of this problem when he wrote:

> Researchers tend to look at the wave that has passed. Students of international communication are no exception...
>
> This is to some extent inevitable. It was as true of classics of social science as it is of inferior works... So we do not have to be ashamed of the fact that most of the current research on international communication which authors believe deals with its structure, is in fact about the old structure that is rapidly passing. Since most researchers are not in the class of Marx, or Weber, or Keynes, more often than not they are writing about a wave that is not about to pass in a decade or two, but that is already well past...[17]

> ... the existing literature does not deal with the most significant and interesting developments in international communications today. It deals with the extraordinary explosion of international mass communication that occurred some two or three decades ago, most notably with the coming of the transistor radio and then television.[19]

The U.S. media system is of course much more expanded and complex that it used to be. It includes new media as well as old media doing new things. Cable, for instance, has evolved from a way to improve television reception in the late 1940s to a new mass medium, now reaching more than 60% of U.S. households and already facing competition from many over-the-air, newer video services. Newspapers have become increasingly electronic, and more and more of them have been absorbed into ever-growing chains and multi-interest corporations. Radio stations have become increasingly units in larger economic concentrations, and FM-radio has increasingly become a medium of narrow-casting appealing to highly specialized interests. Neither telephone nor television is new. Both are doing new things. A television set used to be just a receiver. It now has multiple functions. It even "watches" us too. Even computers and satellites aren't exactly new. What is new is the merging of telephone, television, computers, satellites and many other communications devices into a single yet differentiated system that allows for transmission of information and data between persons or between computers through cables, microwave relays,

or satellites. It was not very long ago when mass communication researchers could completely ignore telecommunications and leave all technical questions to engineers and regulatory problems to lawyers. The convergence of modes of communications has raised new and difficult questions not only for communications specialists and media researchers but for all Americans. Questions such as cable connections and backyard earth stations in a community have become concerns of common citizens. There are, of course, many more complicated communications policy questions than these. For instance, would increasing electrification of print technology lead to more government regulation of the press with attendant dangers to our civil liberties? Or would the increasingly maturing electronic communications allow for more pluralism, diversity and absence of regulation than traditional print media ever did?

We still speak of mass communication. But the mass-ness has changed. New information technologies have enabled newspapers and magazines to have demographic editions for different masses. Various types of viewdata systems can even allow individuals to create the types of information packages which they want, although the development of such systems is still limited by practical economics.

This is perhaps a good place to bring up another communication research area. This is what Menzel calls "Quasi-Mass Communication: A Neglected Area." This is that vast area setting the dichotomy of mass communication and person-to-person communication. This dichotomization, he writes, "leave no room for such phenomena as speakers who take part in election campaigns, street corner orators, luncheon-club circuit riders, salesmen approaching a succession of potential buyers, missionaries preaching in foreign societies, store-front information centers, literary agents, selective dissemination services and numerous others." He raises interesting research questions. For instance, "What sort of transactions, and, beyond these, what social processes are most likely to be fostered by each form of communication -- i.e. by mass communication and by each variety of quasi-mass communication. Which form is likely to lead to greater standardization and homogenization? Which is more nearly monopolizable by groups in power? Which offers the shelter of relative privacy to the transactions of novel, original, suppressed, minority, conspiratorial, or otherwise 'deviant' movements? Which will insulate interest groups from one another? And so on?"[19]

Let us move on and consider another type of communication problems at the global level.

Consider, first, this premise: the world is increasingly 'informationized," this global "informationization" will figure in just about everybody's future, and the sooner and better we understand this phenomenon the greater our chance of finding ways to deal with it.

This tongue-twisting word "informationization" is used not to pervert the English language (it was coined in the 1960s by the Japanese as a translation of johoka shakai, meaning information society), but to stress a new importance of information in our lives. It suggests that information now plays an important role in social change today as steam power and electricity did in industrialization in the nineteenth century. Its meaning is broader than that of such words as "computerization,"[20] "compunication,"[21] and "teleinformatics."[22] It describes not only a merger of computers and telecommunications but a fusion of various modes and systems of communication, an application of information to private and public affairs, and a process of development of information environments.

At any rate, the world is increasingly inter-connected. It is "wired" quite differently now. The oldest nation state in Europe is now a lot less national than before. Much of what European countries have to do these days depends on what kind of arrangement they can work out with other countries. Development, the national policy of all developing countries, used to depend on national efforts. It now depends very heavily on international efforts. Increasingly, the issue is linked with a new agenda of global or

Rapid and continuing advances in communication and information technologies are changing not only the way the world communicates, but also the way we perceive the world and ourselves. They have in recent years restructured international relationships for many countries, redefined the world's political boundaries and economic resources, and reshaped the global balance of power.

Take satellites, for example. This technology, along with computer and microtechnology, is inherently international in scope. It recognizes neither terrestrial boundaries nor political borders. It shrinks the world. It serves as a major factor in the integration of the developing countries into the world economic system, largely because of the reduced cost of satellite telecommunications. It has already affected the power relationships between governments and countries and is continuing to influence the reshaping and restructuring of traditional organizations and relations.

The world is already locked in a titanic struggle for harnessing the communications and information technologies which represent the wave of the future. These technologies represent a leading edge of U.S. strength. For the moment, the United States still dominates the field. Japan is scrambling to catch up, and many European industrialized countries are aggressively jockeying for position. Developing countries are seeking ways

to reap the rewards of the new technologies, and some are trying practically to remake themselves through the technologies. While it is hard to take seriously the view that mastery of the microchip will allow poor developing countries to vault from underdevelopment into the computer society, as prescribed by futuristic writers, it is easy to understand why these countries are determined to attempt some degree of mastery of the new information technology and not to miss out in the information revolution this time as some believe they did in the Industrial Revolution.

Information has acquired a quality of new strategic importance as a factor in international relations. Information, to begin with, is a much broader word than it was twenty years ago. It no longer refers only to conventional bodies of facts, figures, news, intelligence or academic research. It includes also all kinds of data ranging from electronic impulses that measure human heartbeat or numeric digits that record airline reservations to the signals in remote sensing communications and sensors that sight a target and guide a weapon to it.

Information has also become a new wealth of nations. More nations depend increasingly on information not only for the growth of the economy but also for improvement of quality of life. The United States is now described as a country shifting from an industrial to an information economy.

This is not the place to argue whether the U.S. is an information society or whether the world is marching along a preindustrial-industrial-postindustrial path of development. What is important is that more and more industrial nations are devising plans and strategies to develop their "information" sectors -- microchip technology, computers and telecommunications. What is even more important, but often overlooked, is the increasing interest and activity in communications development in the Third World and a desire to exploit new information technologies for developmental objectives: education, national integration, technology transfer, and health welfare services. A growing number of Third World countries have adopted national informatics plans and policies. Informatics, as defined by the Intergovernmental Bureau of Informatics, "is the rational and systematic application of information to economic, social and political development." Yash Pol, secretary general of the Second UN Conference on Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, reflected this mood of the Third World when he talked about satellite technology and said: "We can define neighborhoods

in different terms from space. This provides us with a new agenda, a new perspective of what we should change, exploring the world of not only what is possible, but of what is desirable."[23]

Possession of information or data is not only a symbol of economic growth but a sign of power anywhere. Increasingly, a nation's political, economic and military status in the world is defined or determined by its access to worldwide information and the possession of technology that collects and processes it.

There is no need to go into the implications of this phenomenon for international communication research. The possibilites for research are perhaps as plentiful as the problem is complex.

Finally, a brief word about an entirely different problem of mass communication research:

There was a time when mass communication research was identified by the media. We had newspaper research and radio research, an area distinguished by Lazarsfeld's work. Then much mass communication research was described and defined by the research methods that were used. Now the field is identified by the problems it studies.

What problems should be studied? This is a much harder question for academic communication researchers than for scientists. Physicists and chemists, for instance, generally know what are some of the toughest problems in the field, and the challenge is to find ways to crack them. Communication researchers do not always agree on the most important problems in the field. Their problems are also hard to master too. Economist Gunnar Myrdal used to complain that social scientists "never reach down to constants like the speed of light and of sound in a particular medium, or the specific weights of atoms and molecules," that they "have nothing corresponding to the universally valid measurements of energy, voltage, amperes, and so on," and that the regularities they find do not have the "firm, general and lasting validity of a 'law of nature.'" Mass communication researchers have to wrestle with still more slippery problems than those in economics and on still less firm grounds.

The fact that mass communication researchers must work with scholars from various academic disciplines and professions makes the job of problem-finding and problem-defining even harder for them. Scholars in various disciplines have their own perspectives and many are wedded to their ways to study a problem. Not many of them adapt very easily to a different perspective or a new set of terms.

Mass communication researchers cannot simply turn their problems to other scholars and leave the development of their field through the enterprise of others. They should alert scholars in various disciplines and professions to the critical issues in their field and they must formulate questions for the consideration of other scholars. They must build bridges between their field and others. This is not to say that they cross these bridges occasionally to get some ideas or borrow some tools from some disciplines. Not all the tools they need for research are necessarily available on the shelves of other disciplines. Some tools perhaps do not even exist. Mass communication researchers must then know how to place special orders for these needed tools. For too long too many mass communication researchers have played a rather passive role with what a few fields of social science have to offer to the study of mass communication. And too many seem to be content to do their thing with the tools they have acquired from other fields.

Mass communication researchers have a far more important role to play than that. It would be asking too much to ask them to lead the study of mass communication in academic disciplines or to set a trend of mass communication research. But it is reasonable to expect them to at least do their part to set some parts of the future research agenda.

NOTES

1. Itmiel de Sola Pool, "The New Structure of International Communication: The Role of Research," in International Association for Mass Communication Research, New Structures of International Communication: The Role of Research Main papers from the 1980 Caracas Conference, Leicester, England: Adam Bros. & Shardlow Ltd., 1982, p. 61.

2. Wilbur Schramm, "The Unique Perspective of Communication: A Retrospective View," Journal of Communication, Summer 1983, Vol. 33, No. 3, p. 12.

3. Ibid. p. 13

4. Loc. cit.

5. Jeremy Tunstall, "The Trouble with U.S. Communication Research," Journal of Communication, Spring, 1983, vol. 33, No. 3, p. 92.

6. Bernard Berelson, "The State of Communication Research," Public Opinion Quarterly, 23, 1959, pp. 1-6.

7. Herbert H. Gans, "The Famine in Mass Communication Research," American Journal of Sociology, 78, 1972.

8. Herbert H. Gans, "News Media, News Policy, and Democracy: Research for the Future," Journal of Communication, Vol. 33, No. 3, Summer, 1983, pp. 174-184.

9. Wilbur Schramm, "Communication Research in the United States," in Wilbur Schramm (ed.), The Science of Human Communication, New York: Basic Books, 1963, p. 2.

10. Wilbur Schramm, "The Unique Perspective of Communication," op. cit., p. 9.

    Schramm is fond of using the parable about Bab elh-Dhra, a Bronze Age village, to illustrate what has been happening in the field of communication research. This village flourished some five thousand years ago around an oasis just east of the Dead Sea. Schramm wrote: "For centuries, Bab elh-Dhra, because it was noted for its good water, was a stopping place for caravans and travelers in the Jordanian desert. Then, shortly before 3,000 B.C., when farmers began to replace nomads, some families moved into Bab elh-Dhra and established a village. That settlement existed for a thousand years and passed out of human history. But it left its marks on walls and artifacts and tombs... This is at least analogous to the kind of change that must have been underway when Berelson wrote his 1959 article. For many years, scholars, traveling with their own disciplinary maps, had stopped to look at communication problems, as travelers stopped to refresh themselves at the Jordanian oasis, and then moved on ... But a new type of scholar had already begun to appear in communication.'

11. Leo Bogart, "Consumer and Advertising Research" in Ithiel de Sola Pool, Wilbur Schramm, et al. (ed.), Handbook of Communication, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973, pp. 706-721.

12. W. Phillips Davison and Frederick T.C. Yu, Mass Communication Research: Major Issues and Future Directions, New York: Praeger, 1974.

13. Herbert J. Gans, "News Media, News Policy, and Democracy: Research for the Future," Journal of Communication, Vol. 33, no. 3, Summer 1983, pp. 174-184.

14. Ithiel de Sola Pool, "What Ferment?: A Challenge for Empirical Research," Journal of Communication, Vol. 33, No. 3, pp. 258-261.

15. Edwin B. Parker, "Technological Change and the Mass Media," in Ithiel de Sola Pool, Wilbur Schramm, et al, Handbook of Communication, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973, p. 639.

16. Edwin B. Parker, "Technology Assessment or Institutional Change," George Gerbner, Larry P. Gross, William H. Melody (ed.), Communications Technology and Social Policy, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973.

17. Ithiel de Sola Pool, "The New Structure of International Communication: The Role of Research," in International Association for Mass Communication Research, New Structures of International Communication: The Role of Research, Leicester, England: Adams Bros. and Shardlow Ltd., 1982, pp. 60-61.

18. Ibid., p. 63.

19. Herbert Menzel, "Quasi-Mass Communication: A Neglected Area," Public Opinion Quarterly, Fall 1971, pp. 406-409.

20. Simon Nora and Alain Minc, The Computerization of Society: A Report to the President of France, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1981.

21. Coined by Anthony Oettinger of Harvard University's Program on Information Resources Policy.

22. John M. Eger, "The Global Phenomenon of Teleinformatics: An Introduction," Cornell Information Law Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2, Summer 1981, pp. 203-236.

23. Satellite Communications, March 1982, pp. 62-63.