The Handbook of Global Media and Communication Policy

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Robin Mansell and Marc Raboy

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Media Research and Public Policy: Tiding Over the Rupture

Biswajit Das and Vibodh Parthasarathi

Introduction

This chapter engages with the conflicting relations between media research and public policy in India. It follows the trajectory of "policy-making in communications" as well as the "history of communication research" in universities in India. In doing so, we find a lack of fit between the two. We question the discursive formation by analyzing the forms of expertise and knowledge practices that were being constituted in the post-liberalization period along with the entry of new stakeholders in the field. The chapter emphasizes the need for conceiving of and operationalizing an intense dialogue between higher education and policy-making bodies, so as to highlight the lessons to be learned from experiences in India and elsewhere.

Policy-making in the domain of media in India has always been a site where competing interest groups were at loggerheads. Several such encounters were observed in the century before 1947. While colonial governmentality sought to reconstitute the public sphere, native public opinion, itself highly layered, incessantly questioned the colonial covenant (Kalpagam 2002; Das 2005). Early newspapers, telegraphy, and cinema were the obvious playing fields of the colonial government. This was complemented by the streamlining of

traditional networks of communication, from the village upwards, to institutionalize the management of "information" (Bailey 1993). While both of these dynamics are readily visible in the organization of propaganda,[1] the deeper intention of this complex strengthening of communication systems was the attainment of effective and efficient administrative means to support colonial modes of appropriation. On its part, the Congress Party's concerted attempts throughout the 1920s and 1930s to develop a countrywide communication network forced the colonial administration to deploy sweeping policies of proscription.[2] All in all, as much as the colonialists deployed a plethora of media and social technologies as a strategic aspect of their administration of Indian society, all shades of anti-British forces also used various kinds of media for mobilizing and protecting their interests.

The anti-colonial struggle would have been a case in point for the votaries of freedom to create a synergy, harnessing multiple voices to make media policy in independent India. On the contrary, the struggles for freedom could not escape the colonial legacy of centralized structures of policy-making; but nor did they want to miss the benefits of laissez-faire. The independent government did not want to script any policy for the media in an integrated manner, as both press and cinema evolved

as independent units after sustained negotiations and struggle with the colonial administration. Hence, the government of the day was only left with radio and television to exercise its power in making policies from time to time. Precisely because policy frames shared a common origin in concepts, policies, and laws from the latter half of the nineteenth century, the colonial legacy shaped the possibilities for the reconstruction of independent India's institutions (Farmer 2000).

When the pretensions of integrating media policy did emerge, they were guided by the requirements of the planned economy. Spelled out in planning documents, these initiatives were obsessed with addressing the role of the media and media technology for development. As a result, communication research undertaken after Independence legitimized state-sponsored projects and justified technocratic solutions for social change. Although critiques did emerge, these voices could neither reach the forefront nor, importantly, develop an alternative perspective of communication in the Indian context. Communication research became concerned with the direct bearing or impact of the mass media on people's minds. Various institutes, sponsored by the government, emerged during this period not only to develop professionals for these purposes but also to evaluate the growth and expansion of communication technologies. Among the most emphasized concerns in officially sponsored research were studies on the structure and content of the press, and those on public opinion and audiences of the mass media.

From the early 1950s to the late 1960s, two methodological watersheds emerged. First, research began to operate within the orbit of power structures whereby the techniques of bibliographical compilation and the analysis of documents predominated. Opinion research picked up the other end of the communication process by confining itself to the study of reactions and preferences of audiences. By the 1970s, the term "extension" became a catchword for central planners and departments undertaking research on agriculture, family planning, and rural development. The idea of extension emerged because the first two Five-Year Plans, while emphasizing development, did not have a vision to reach the masses. Since they relied on people consuming messages on development programs through the mass

media, the decade of the 1950s did not see substantial gains. Consequently, the Third Five-Year Plan emphasized the need for an approach based on extension (i.e., involving interpersonal communication and change-agents). The aim was to reach the people, instead of waiting for people to avail themselves of the services and opportunities provided by the state. This new emphasis grew rapidly with the quantitative expansion of studies on the "diffusion of innovations." Perhaps the sole benefit of all such research was that it directed attention to the dynamics of communication in rural India, which, until then, were little explored by social scientists. While this body of work revealed unknown facets of regional cultures and peasant worldviews, it had enormous inadequacies in terms of explaining and interpreting them, to say the least (Vilanilam 1993; Kumar 1998).

In the aftermath of the Emergency (1975–77), and for the first time, the media became a politically driven domain of government policy. The aftermath of the Emergency witnessed alternative voices of intellectuals who interrogated the relationship between state and civil society. Simultaneously, media professionals who had encountered the draconian measures of the Emergency on the press, started focussing on measures to reorganize state radio and television into an autonomous public organization. A committee was set up, known as the Verghese Committee, to draft the bill for autonomy of All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan, respectively, the radio and television arms of the national public broadcaster. Although the Verghese Committee started with a high degree of legitimacy in drafting the bill for autonomy, internal strife within the political regime prevented any significant headway. Over time, these efforts, largely addressing the realm of free speech, became relatively marginal in policy debates. For subsequent political regimes, "autonomy" became a catchall phrase for a range of political battles surrounding free speech; but the issue of autonomy for AIR and Doordarshan, from the organizational and financial clutches of government, remains far from settled.

Significantly, despite first-generation media policy research (like media research in general) being conducted within the framework of a centralized and statist developmental paradigm, no specialist research center informing development policy related to the media had ever been created. And by

1991, when the process of economic liberalization was initiated, development concerns did not feature at all on the agenda of state support. For one, there were changes in the institutional and substantive outlook toward development processes with the unleashing of deregulation in public infrastructure, and in media infrastructure in particular. On the part of universities, where most media research was undertaken, and which were equally affected by this new context, the emphasis shifted concertedly toward the production of the human resources to meet the needs of an expanding media industry.

University as Public Institution

The rise of communication and media studies in post-Independence India can be attributed to the following factors: the professionalization of communication and media, the emergence of new institutional support' for teaching and research (with the expansion of universities, colleges, and funding agencies), and the growth in the specialization of communication research in terms of the choices available regarding research themes and methods. Courses and colleges were set up in order to contribute to the expansion of the number of teachers and researchers. Lastly, American global influence in communication studies, including a variety of innovative methods in communication research, had become overwhelming. Even though its influence in India was selective or adaptive, several innovations by American communication studies scholars in the areas of policy research were found to be relevant for planning and development projects pursued by the Indian state. This was especially true in the spread of messages to promote education, healthcare, and innovative practices in various economic sectors, particularly agriculture and rural development.

Not surprisingly, most research in communication and development by anthropologists and other social scientists during the period between 1950 and 1960 reflected this perspective. These studies were of two types: first, there were those where the substantive themes included systemic studies of social structure, culture, ecology, and the economy of a village, a tribal community, a city, or an

urban settlement. In these studies, we witness an implicit or explicit focus on the networks of communication and their significance to the continuities and changes in structures, values, and aspirations of the people. The second type of study aimed to explore the structural and cultural networks of communication in order to make use of them to motivate people to accept innovations for development and change. These, apart from empirical observations, reflected theoretical concerns and made use of emergent and sophisticated theoretical and methodological paradigms for the study of communication systems and their application for nation-building and development.

The contributions to communication research during this period came from several specialists (Lakshman Rao 1966; Roy 1969; Hartman 1989). They demonstrated, through their research, the linkages between communication and the Indian processes of development and modernization. Theoretically and methodologically, several studies made use of Rogers' communication model, "diffusion of innovation." Most such studies, however, used empirical designs of research premised upon the rational-utilitarian paradigm of social action and the shaping of choices in decision-making.

This empirical tradition of communication research in India gradually began to establish the relevance of communication in policy formulation and development planning. It also sensitized researchers to the need for interdisciplinary perspectives to generate a fuller understanding of social structures and processes. The significance of communication in the analysis of political behaviors, institutions, and processes, such as through political parties, leadership, voting behavior, political mobilization, and modernization, among other related issues, is widely reflected in these studies.

Support for conducting research on policy-related problems – notably, health and family planning, productivity and innovations in agriculture, and community development – was initiated by the Planning Commission of the Government of India. Most of these studies were prioritized on the basis of their relevance for planning and development. In many cases, they were based on the need to generate benchmark data required for development projects. It is intriguing that while communication research was conducted in agricultural universities and in social science faculties in various universities, courses on media were introduced in

some universities without any research orienta-tion. Much thinking had been invested in the professional growth of communication, in mod-ernization, and in the standardization of its curric-ular structure. This was supported by the University Grants Commission (UGC) which set up subject-specific national panels of professors to periodi-cally review, upgrade, and modernize the syllabi in consultation with its teachers. These syllabi catered to the requirements of industry and maintained a close nexus between communication departments and professional requirements. More and more communication faculties distanced themselves from social science departments and surfaced as professional courses (teaching programs) to pro-duce skilled personnel for the print, public rela-tions, and audiovisual industries.

Impetus for the growth of communication research gained new momentum when, toward the end of the 1960s, the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) was established. The ICSSR has made a great impact upon the profes-sional and disciplinary growth of research in com-munication. So far, it has published three decennial surveys of research undertaken in India in the field of communication. These surveys reveal that most research catered to micro studies based on the eval-uation of policy implementation, the cultural ten-sions that emerged due to the advent of satellite television, and the impact of media in society.[4]

But the impasse in teaching and its relationship with policy studies in communication continued. Except for one or two institutions, hardly any media courses were taught as optional courses or as a sub-field in any social science faculty. Hence, there was a double impasse: while courses on media in social science departments were under-theorized, the curriculum in mass communication and journal-ism departments was untheorized, since it focussed exclusively on skill development. Furthermore, there was an uneven funding basis as well as a hier-archy. For instance, while central universities were totally funded by the UGC, state universities were only partially funded by this body. Moreover, while most state university departments were teaching departments, the central universities, despite far better facilities, lacked coherent research programs and additional funding for research. This was not due to the paucity of funds per se, as these very central university departments kept acquiring tech-nological gadgets to meet changing market

demands to create professionals for the industry. While most central universities have moved from teaching print to audiovisual media, most state uni-versity departments are still confined to print jour-nalism courses, albeit increasingly under the generic degree program of "mass communication." Despite these discomforting developments, these public institutions did contribute immensely to the growth of the discipline, albeit in a truncated manner. Nevertheless, rarely has the discipline grown along-side the changing times.

The 1990s witnessed a boom of private teach-ing institutions. Most of these institutions, initially affiliated with various state universities, now mushroomed as "deemed universities" and "pri-vate universities" approved under a special clause of the UGC and the All India Council of Technical Education. Universities experienced arbitrary increases in admission fees and lured students with job placements in the industry. No doubt, these institutions fared well in branding them-selves by not associating with or following the guidelines of UGC. Instead, they chose to follow the rules of the All India Council of Technical Education, thus equating communication studies with management and engineering courses. Thus, the upcoming private universities concentrated on management, engineering, and mass commu-nication as technical courses and demanded a higher fee for admission. In addition, most of these institutions did not follow the rules set out by the UGC to recruit trained faculty. They recruited professionals from the industry to run their hands-on training programs, including courses in media. Public universities did not lag too far behind and started introducing such "pro-fessional" courses as well. Thus, instead of engag-ing with innovations in a changed scenario, public universities replicated courses to compete with private institutions. Most of these professional courses were launched on a self-financing basis by university departments, thus affecting the founda-tional courses (i.e., in social science disciplines) that had been launched earlier by these institu-tions. Media courses now charge higher fees than social science programs do. The recent develop-ment is further worrisome as the industrial houses have started media programs for in-house produc-tion. What is missing in this entire endeavor is the polemical debate regarding the discipline and its grounding in Indian society.

The very idea of the university having a public mission is now questioned. Instead of producing technologies, ideas, and innovations, it has become a mere form of paid labor for the industry. The institution neither provides the space for free and open debate for critical inquiry involving all stakeholders nor informs broad public discourse and specialized policy-making. Moreover, much has changed theoretically with respect to the perspectives that contribute to an understanding of the field of communication in India. But a cursory glance at the discipline, either in existing mass communication schools and centers or in some social science faculties where communication and media is offered as a subject, reflects the inability to address the questions that are encountered in the day-to-day life of civil society. While mass communication schools and centers try to assure their position through an alliance with the media industry, social science faculties touch upon the cultural dimensions of communication due to the lack of a vibrant tradition of policy science as a discipline. Thus, culture becomes a point of entry for these media scholars, at the cost of addressing the larger questions that advocates in civil society have to take on. Unfortunately, there are few such coherent engagements due to a lack of intensive civil society initiatives in the field of communication. It is surprising that while mass communication schools and social science faculties rarely touch upon the realm of policy, the realm is fast gaining prominence among management and engineering institutions in the country, largely because of their alleged and perceived technical nature. Further, due to the lack of any formal association of communication scholars in the country, their scattered voices go unheard. At best, both public and private bodies look at them with suspicion.

In recent years, there is much talk about access and equity but rarely is one engaged with the "publicness" of public institutions. In addition, there is no serious realization that the university is not the only center for knowledge generation for the public good. Although in rare cases, academic research is engaged with the art of policy implementation through micro studies, these lack the ability to penetrate the citadel of policy planners. This has resulted in the growth of more and more freelance consultants, think tanks, and commissioned research awarded to small organizations because of their flexibility to receive such funds.

Funding from donors that is granted to university centers and departments and that is inclined toward policy has barriers, on both the supply side and the demand side: institutional protocols are weak and/or non-existent; and advocacy and policy research requires partners, human expertise, activities, and even budget-heads that are different from the conventional university "project." However, the research administration at most universities (where it exists in a systematic form) grew out of the need to receive and expend money from the arms of government rather than from private and philanthropic organizations. Despite wider liberalization in the economy, these barriers are even more acute when it comes to receiving support from international and multilateral donors, except when such support comes as a result of existing bilateral agreements. Often, support from non-university and non-government sources (i.e., the principal supporters of the little policy research that does occur) is viewed by academic administrations as a threat or is considered to pave the way toward the administrative autonomy of a particular department or center. All of this then creates uncertainty on the part of donors when considering support to universities. These donors then tend to support civil society organizations (CSOs), where policy studies are even less prominent.

The lack of academic research in media policy also occurs because sometimes academics in quasi-government universities and research centers are apprehensive that their research might uncap controversy and adversely impact their prospects for advancement. Issues of public interest, advocacy, and policy-making are often considered exogenous to the scope of research in social science departments of universities that contend with historical, theoretical, and, at best, evaluation research. The latter is typically confined to measuring the impact of government programs and thus lacks the space or perspective for critical engagement with policy.

Traditionally, policy research as an academic field in India has been weak and is limited largely to a focus on economic policy. But from the late 1980s, there has been a growth in policy studies in domains such as the environment, gender, and health. This growth was influenced by, if not being a result of, global trends and international advocacy including the need for research which unfolded alongside the Earth Summit held in 1992. Some economic policy centers, like the Indian Council for Research on

International Economic Relations (ICRIER), irregularly produce studies on aspects of the media as part of their general body of work on international trade, competition policy, and foreign investment. Similarly, the more generic policy research centers, like the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), tangentially address the sphere of media as part of their wider work on accountability and transparency. In so doing, while this work rarely examines the specificity of the media industry and is thinly aware of global literature on the subject, it does provide benchmarks on policy responses. Thus, in established institutional frameworks of policy research, the emphasis on media policy has evolved neither as rapidly nor as strategically as would be desired. These think tanks did not seriously pursue policy research on the media, owing either to a lack of expertise or their inability to sense the potential of the field. Recall that first-generation media studies and media policy research were conducted in the framework of development, when the latter was struggling for academic legitimacy. Paradoxically, despite development studies and policy having gained an overarching prominence within academia more generally, media studies remains a black hole.

Constraints in Policy and Regulatory Process

Shifts in media policy engulfing India since 1991 have been guided neither by the creation of the necessary knowledge nor by market-related institutions. Rather, they have been guided by a policy framework on the part of the state that can best be described as one of "strategic neglect."[1] Partly as a consequence, there is extensive fragmentation at all levels in the structure of policy-making in the media and communication industry. This has created a scenario where the industry is dealt with by the Departments/Ministries of Information Technology, Telecommunications, Information and Broadcasting, Industry, Commerce and Human Resource Development. This completely ignores the phenomenon that action in any one of these has substantial implications on – or worse, emerges at cross-purposes with – policies of the other.

Media policy-making is being conducted without adequate input from independent quarters outside of government and industry. A cursory

look at the members of various government and public–private committees set up to formulate or review aspects of media policy in different sectors over the last decade shows this quite clearly. Such advisory and/or decision-making bodies usually are constituted by representatives from relevant ministries, heads of trade bodies, and senior management from media firms. It is rare to see civil society representation (unless the committee explicitly deals with the "social" sector), and academia is consistently conspicuous by its absence. Moreover, there is no concerted desire by government to measure or evaluate the rationale, relevance, and impact of projects from independent quarters. In cases where policy evaluation processes are undertaken, these, while rarely being transparent, are short of systematic and consistent mechanisms for obtaining informed inputs.

The reasons for poor pre-policy and consultative processes are multiple. First and foremost, protocols for consulting outsiders are knee-jerk or ad hoc. And in the absence of streamlined protocols, outsiders who get heard are the dominant voices – those having powerful means for or other avenues of advocacy. This, in turn, reinforces the impression that these outsiders represent the vested interests. Second, when specialized professionals are involved in policy-making, they are usually solicited for single-issue inputs; rarely are they required to sustain their interaction to either confront trade-offs or to respond to objections from divergent propositions. Last but not least, there is no systematic mapping of stakeholders associated with a policy measure, which tends to give the impression that every policy announcement has "only opponents" (Agarwal and Somanathan 2005: 14–15). As much as this is true, the graver consequence is that policy options are being weighed without the input of different viewpoints and possibilities, let alone among interest-neutral competencies.

One key trait of media deregulation over the last 15 years is undoubtedly the periodic stalling, or gross reversal, of decisions and protocols without any fresh empirical reasoning. An apt instance of this was the government's decision to introduce a Conditional Access System for cable television in the major cities from mid-July 2003. But sections of the cable industry continued to argue against aspects of the policy, giving bizarre reasons for its delayed implementation like a shortage of set-top boxes. Days before the proposed date of

implementation, July 15, it was postponed to September, and it was clarified that implementation would be initiated in a phased manner. As if this was not enough, a Parliamentary Committee recommended a further postponement, which was ultimately not accepted by the government. In September 2003, the system was implemented in Chennai but not in New Delhi, Kolkata, and Mumbai. This was unsurprising, since the extended family of Tamilnadu's Chief Minister owned a leading cable network. Yet residents of Chennai subsequently sought to reverse the decision through the courts.

As in this illustrative case, what is significant in all policy processes is that substantive debate – with and among the public – occurred after the formulation and announcement of the policy, and not before; and much more so after matters entered the courts. This is not to deny that interference by interest groups and extra-constitutional factors do play a considerable role in delays, derailments, sudden changes, and/or postponements in many cases. It is here that well-structured policy-making processes backed by informed research can go a long way toward muting such factors. A sound and structured policy-making process requires due consideration of up-to-date and available subject-matter knowledge and relevant data, and the use of available analytical tools (Agarwal and Somanathan 2005: 8). Interest groups and extra-constitutional factors are often a manifestation of concerns ignored in the policy-making process.

Perhaps the recognition of some of these malaises led to the creation of a landmark instrument: the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act (TRAI), 1997. While the Act was a response to the geometric expansion of the mobile telecommunication sector and the related glut of private actors,[6] in the institutional history of TRAI, two substantial changes unfolded. First, the Act was modified, following lessons learned from the bottlenecks in its implementation, as the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Act, 2000. The Amendment created an arbitration body, the Telecom Disputes Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT), to mediate and quickly resolve disputes between a licensor and licensee, between service providers and consumers. The TDSAT was also used to arbitrate appeals against decisions taken by TRAI.[7] Second, since TRAI was the sole regulatory institution in the communication industry, over the years it became, by default, the

de facto regulator for other sectors of the information and media industries.[8] As a result, TRAI has been producing consultative papers and recommendations on matters ranging from community radio to the digitalization of cable distribution, from 3G, or third-generation, mobile services to transnational satellite television.

The Planning Commission rightly emphasized that consistent and coherent regulatory frameworks can only be developed by allowing regulators sufficient scope to develop their sectors and to achieve clearly defined objectives.[9] Unfortunately, none of the principal objectives that the regulator enumerated pertained to generating the necessary knowledge. In its nine functional heads, "research" is noticeably absent.[10] A lack of resources cannot be the explanation here as the Institutional Capacity Building Project of TRAI, funded by the Planning Commission's budget, enables TRAI to conduct and commission studies, and facilitate short training opportunities abroad, for more than a dozen staff members. None of the studies has been awarded to academic or semi-academic entities; three of the five studies completed during the 2005–06 period were awarded to foreign, private consulting organizations.[11]

While TRAI has stimulated market growth through competitive and oligopolistic means, there is much to be desired in its efforts to protect consumer rights, ensure Universal Service Obligation (USO) stipulations, and enforce service quality – the latter has been particularly recognized in its own reports (TRAI 2005). Organizationally, however, there is a lack of trained staff, especially economists, accountants, and lawyers skilled in regulatory policy analysis.[12] Personnel at TRAI have limited capacity in the use of methods, such as regulatory impact assessment (RIA), to assist in the design and implementation of new measures. Consultation papers (CPs) prepared by TRAI may not pass even the most rudimentary peer review benchmarks of scholarly media journals. Considering its status and importance as the regulator of one of the fastest-growing media industries worldwide, TRAI has never shown interest in aggregating data and remains content to rely entirely on "industry sources." Despite the mushrooming of the media industry in the post-1991 years, the media are almost invisible in the national statistical tables of India; and there is little indication of relative industry profiles, livelihoods, and

wage figures.[12] For their part, corporate stakeholders support or contest the regulator's game plan by conducting research through trade bodies or consultancy firms, which masquerade as scientific studies.

The lack of detailed empirical data on the media industry can be explained in terms of the wider deficiencies in enumerating the service sector as a whole – namely, the sector's historically low profile and conceptual ambiguity over its classificatory protocols.[14] For most of the twentieth century, economists regarded services as dependent upon manufacturing, and thus invested less in their measurement or conceptualization. Most segments of the mass media became a casualty of this approach. Arguably, the very notion of services as distinct from manufacturing reflects an artefact of industrial organization in recent years, rather than a substantial economic fact. The two are clearly interrelated and to a far greater extent than existing classifications may convey.

This void in data on the media in India can also be explained by the rapid changes to which the various media sectors are continually exposed. Because of the close dependence on technological change, this dynamism often makes it difficult to keep abreast of new kinds and modes of services coming onto the market in a continuous stream. Even where enumerations on the media industry have gathered momentum, such as in cinema and the music industries, only physical goods have entered the scope of audits,[15] with the exception being TRAI's reports on telecommunication services. While innovative methods to capture media services have yet to be conceived by the regulator and the government – an area where academia could play a role – the need becomes urgent as the media move towards digitalization, convergence, and dematerialization.[16]

Amidst this landscape, it is often argued that the absence of official enumerations on the media industry can be explained by managerial and/or financial constraints on the Government of India. However, this explanation is partial and rather lopsided. First, there were regular collections of large sets of data relating to the agricultural sector (especially from the mid-1960s), as well as on the manufacturing sector (more extensively from the 1970s). Second, organizations like the Planning Commission, the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO), and the National Council for Applied

Economic Research (NCAER) have conducted national surveys periodically on specific industries in the core and small-scale sectors. In fact, the CSO has been actively encouraging and supporting a variety of organizations to undertake "in-depth statistical analysis" with a view to "facilitate policy formulation and development planning" (Central Statistical Organisation 2010). Third, government invests in extensive/intensive data collection in the domain of information that it considers a priority, be this directed, for example, at increasing the efficacy of either its apparatus (as with the Unique Identification Scheme; see Maringanati 2009; Shukla 2010), or its legitimacy, as demonstrated by commissioning the assessment of the right to information (RTI).[17] Moreover, large amounts of resources are being spent on measuring and evaluating information and communication technology projects by union and state governments. These projects are undertaken either by governments or are subcontracted through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Fourth, specific to the media industry, we should recall that in the three decades when the public broadcaster Doordarshan (DD) was the sole player in the televisual sphere, gathering documentation was an integral part of its organizational mission and pan-Indian activities.[18] Today, however, it may be argued that since DD is a small player in the television industry (and thus it is neither directly involved nor able to determine techno-commercial choices), gathering relevant data is a low priority on its administrative agenda. While this may be partially true, it does not convey the full picture and, similarly, does not give due weight to the kinds of data DD collected. We find that because DD's mandate was framed by welfare economics, the very nature of the data collected (and which it still sometimes continues to collect) was driven less by commercial criteria and more by its (public) service criteria. Its enumeration of the landscape of television therefore focussed on cognitive and programmatic metrics of television audiences. This practice was reinforced by the pointlessness of commercial enumerations in a milieu where DD was the only player in the television industry. In short, since the years when DD alone constituted the "Indian industry," there has not been a tradition of collecting data on the commercial aspects of television.

In the mid-1990s, it was believed that comprehensive data were difficult to obtain on this sunrise sector of the Indian economy since the nascent

milieu of commercial television was in a state of flux. Thus, there was a rationale put forward which impeded the very idea of accurate measurement. With increasing emphasis on corporate governance during this decade (by the state and industry alike), and the spate of stock listings by firms in the media/entertainment industry – both of which entailed varying emphases on public disclosure – companies in the television industry were expected to generate and share a wider universe of information on their commercial, legal, and technological operations. While this has brought some information into the public domain, the present norms of corporate disclosure do not yield sufficient data sets, either for academic uses or to better serve the public interest.

In the last decade, many private agencies sought to collect data and publish overviews and surveys on the media industry as a whole, a trend observed globally (UNCTAD 2002). In the case of television in India, the last decade has seen three kinds of organizations involved in enumeration: individual businesses, since most maintain firm-level and industry-level data for strategic purposes, and for the minimal financial and legal disclosures required of them by government; industry associations and segment-specific trade bodies that often collect data as an ongoing in-house activity; and consulting firms commissioned by the previous two organizations.[19] These measures have limited purchase on the cause of social science research since they predominantly reflect the intentions of private stakeholders. While this has played a significant role in promoting the case for, and the significance of, the creative economy in the present milieu, it has done so in a manner that is inward looking, sometimes self-aggrandizing, and possibly, therefore, unscientific. Apart from raising issues of measurement – the kernel of which rests in the trio of validity, coverage, and accuracy[20] – none of the data and analysis that are generated is in the public domain. Some of them are commercially available, albeit access requires considerations and resources beyond the means of professional researchers and small advocacy groups. This prevents a wider and more diverse set of interpretations of these data sets, however methodologically questionable and empirically limited they might be.

The unwillingness and inability of the government to aggregate primary and statutory material on the media industry in India is detrimental, not just to policy research and evaluation but often, consequently, to the exercise of policy options. Lack of sufficient and reliable data means that policy-makers, scholars, and media advocates are sparsely informed about core issues such as equity structures, levels of finance, concentration ratios, and so on. They are thus highly under-equipped to formulate regulatory instruments and governance protocols or, for that matter, to question the logic and empirical assumptions of existing policy frameworks. In this context, it is noteworthy that the approach adopted in the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, a document produced by the Planning Commission, found that while policy enunciation imposes an obligation to observe cross-media ownership rules for media companies, these rules have not yet been formalized. As a result, print and electronic media integration is taking place and could result in the emergence of media behemoths acquiring a market-share disproportionate to what is permissible in a competitive market environment (Planning Commission 2007). The absence of reliable measures and instruments of measurement has become a significant barrier to engaging in strongly contested sites of policy formulation. These sites are central to nurturing the values and objectives of the public interest and for the workings of our media, be they commercially or state-run.

Bridging the Rupture

Straddling several disciplines, media policy studies or media regulation studies are undertaken by scholars advancing different theoretical perspectives, using various research methodologies, and who hold different assumptions about the relations between regulation and the wider politico-economic processes. Not surprisingly, the various definitions of regulation, summarized as the minimal, the prudent, and the over-ambitious, reflect specific disciplinary concerns; are oriented toward different research methods; and reflect, to a significant extent, the unique personal, national, and historical experiences of the formulator of the definition. The minimalist approach, followed hitherto in the media industry by the Indian government, seems to have some advantages. It reminds us not only that we employ the notion of

regulation differently, both across and within differ-
ent disciplines, but also that the importance of
regulation and regulatory institutions in the gov-
ernance of the media economy remains a con-
tested issue. The downside of this minimalism is
that it may be counter-productive to the consolida-
tion of cross-disciplinary research in the study of
regulation among a greater and diverse body of
scholarship.

Since the mid-2000s, many ministries and gov-
ernment agencies have launched consultations at
every possible opportunity, engaging key trade
organizations, civil society, think tanks, and other
agencies. Moreover, government is increasingly
making information, such as major laws, regula-
tions, and policy data, available on the Internet.
For instance, the Directorate General of Foreign
Trade (DGFT), the Central Board of Excise and
Customs (CBEC), and other key trade-related
organizations, have made their web sites more com-
prehensive in terms of data content (Chaturvedi
and Mohanty 2008: 3). In our field, the online doc-
umentation by TRAI and TDSAT is becoming both
rich and organized, especially when compared
with that of the Ministry of Information and
Broadcasting's. So the question beckons: Why
don't scholars engage with the regulator and, in
particular, respond to TRAI calls for comments?

A starting point for TRAI would be to commis-
sion extensive literature reviews of current policy
and policy research trends, globally. This would be
an opportunity for scholars to engage with the
regulator in a field vital to its ongoing work. The
sole existing opportunity for scholar–regulator
engagement is through TRAI's Open Sessions, fol-
lowing the release of its various CP on specific
policy options. But it must be borne in mind that
such an interface, conceived under the marketplace
of ideas model of deliberative democracy, assumes
that people will muster the enthusiasm and
resources to articulate themselves, and those need-
ing representation will become aware of the need
and will find the wherewithal to become repre-
sented, as observed elsewhere (Abramson *et al.*
2008: 307). Second, scholars could be inspired to
address an important lacuna in TRAI CPs (for
instance, benchmarking relevant scenarios in other
countries, which is currently and unfortunately ill-
informed). Delineating and addressing these weak-
nesses will be of direct academic relevance to
scholars from both media and area studies. This

has the added traction of, in turn, sowing the seeds
of comparative documentation and research
among scholars and research students. Lastly, yet
most importantly, is the need to create a repository
of policy documents and parliamentary proceed-
ings, another avenue to be catalyzed under the aus-
pices of TRAI. While TRAI does provide notices
on upcoming consultations and calls for com-
ments, what is invariably lacking is contextual doc-
umentation generated by the many ministries
dealing with the media and information sectors. A
dynamic archive would enable research students
and scholars to more easily and more fully weigh
in on particular policy questions, while simultane-
ously motivating them to refine their research
questions, curricula, and student projects around
the needs of policy-makers.[21]

This urges us to reflect on avenues of engage-
ment on the part of scholars themselves, since
communication research matters to policy as much
as policy matters to communication research. This,
of course, leads us head-on to wider challenges to
reconceptualize the field in India in the light of
both the emergent media milieu, in general, and
the policy-making environment, in particular. In
this context, we underscore the fact that in the few
instances where academics have shown sustained
engagement with policy and policy-making struc-
tures, this has been done with or through industry
and civil society organizations. Undoubtedly, such
dovetailing has helped and has often sharpened the
response of CSOs, who, invariably, carry greater
legitimacy and sometimes even greater resources.
But this carries a danger as such engagement is
being conducted outside the institutional frame-
work of teaching and research (the case of advo-
cacy on community radio is a case in point in this
regard) (Parthasarathi and Chotani 2010).
Moreover, in this scenario, scholars understandably
tend to don the hat of the activist. While this is
not completely undesirable, such a vantage point
inhibits scholars from playing a wider role to
engage systematically with divergent propositions
and policy options.

Designing student projects around policy for-
mulation and evaluation within the overall canvas
of a teaching program is another hitherto unex-
plored avenue. This could contribute to creating a
"real-world" environment within mainstream cur-
ricula and pedagogy and could go a long way in
stimulating students to pursue what may be seen

as an otherwise bland and often abstract classroom session in policy studies. Moreover, this provides an apt playing field to substantially involve media activists and activism as, respectively, the subject and object of student analyses. Such a well-oiled system over time offers the possibility for university departments to conduct pilot studies – on contiguous themes like forecasting, program analyses, and impact assessment – in different parts of the country. However, to be deployed outside pedagogical frameworks, the methodologies for such exercises need to be carefully vetted so as to enhance their validity, which may require building specific capacities among faculty members and mentors. However, such an approach could yield rich insights for TRAI across a large and diverse country like India and possibly at much lower cost than if commissioned from consulting firms, as is the norm for TRAI.

An early effort to bridge the gap between scholarship and public policy was illustrated by the creation of the Centre for Telecom Policy Studies (CTPS) at the leading business school, the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A). Set up in 1997 with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and through academic collaboration with the Centre for Regulatory Industries at McGill University, the CTPS sought to bring new knowledge to the attention of decision-makers and to catalyze scholars to produce better insights on policy issues.[22] Although CIDA's support ended in 2002, the business school, recognizing the contribution of CTPS, and in a similar manner to related initiatives already housed there, has been supporting it ever since.[23] Focussed on the challenges confronting the structure and functioning of the telecommunication sector, the research team was built around IIM-A's interdisciplinary faculty and employee associates. Besides conducting research[24] and generating an array of publications over the last decade, CTPS staff have been prominent in peer group conferences, conducting training programs and networks with industry and government through policy dialogues.

A noteworthy instance of the government–activist–academic interface surfaced during a long-gestating phase of advocacy in the deregulation of radio. In media-centric initiatives by NGOs, since the mid-1990s there has been a growing realization of the importance of communication as both an instrumental and a substantive activity. In delving

into this, it is useful to observe that, from the Eighth Plan (1992–1997) onwards, considerable emphasis and space was given to NGOs in the planning and policy formulation processes. Government recognized that their initiatives, variously relying on people's active participation, had a greater chance of success. By the Tenth Plan, measures were taken to create an "enabling environment for the voluntary sector to collaborate with Government for development."[25] This incrementally created a scenario wherein NGOs, once located outside and even in opposition to the apparatus of the state, were cumulatively integrated with government's planning protocols.

Some time before deregulation in radio was considered and just after the initial deregulation in television, a group of media professionals and NGOs gathered in Bangalore to reflect on the relevance and possibilities of community radio in India. This meeting, held in September 1996, occurred close on the heels of the landmark 1995 Supreme Court judgment on "airwaves being public property" (AIR 1995: SC 1236). Subsequently, much as in Sri Lanka and Nepal, community radio campaigners in India, ably supported by some academics, synergized their interests to support an association, the Community Radio Forum (CRF).[26] The CRF was created initially through "CR-India," a discussion list started in 2000 to consolidate the campaign to licence community radio stations. As the nodal agency for advocacy, CRF facilitated an interface between the government, media activists, academics, and donors, on the one hand, and helped organizations to set up community radio stations, on the other.[27] In February 2007, the CRF was registered and at its first annual conference brought together NGOs, academics, government officials, and funding organizations to discuss opportunities and hurdles likely to be faced by those setting up community radio stations. In February 2008, the CRF organized its second annual conference, followed by a two-day, hands-on workshop, "Technology for Radio," which marked part of the gradual shift in such meetings and the move from deliberating values to building capacities. At its third annual conference held in February 2009, CRF transformed its structure from a loose network to a formalized organization, with a core team of representatives from many states.[28] Going a step further, CRF planned a consortium of

existing community radio stations to collectively negotiate advertising rates with agencies. This signified CRF's preparation for a dialogue with "the market" in a manner strikingly similar to that conducted by trade bodies in the private sector to collectivize small FM broadcasters and to negotiate with advertising agencies. It also illustrates how representative bodies are able to devise mechanisms to sustain their relevance incrementally and, thereby, to legitimate themselves as key political actors.

In an unusual and unique initiative, the Department of Telecommunication took the lead in creating the Telecom Centres of Excellence (TCOEs). Set up in the trendy public–private partnership (PPP) mode, TCOEs were first visualized in the Eleventh Plan documents (Planning Commission 2009: 106) to champion the cause of government, academia, and industry working together. Between May 2006 and February 2008, six such TCOEs were created.²⁹ The inauguration of most of the new centres was presided over by the Prime Minister – an indication of the significance of these ventures. While it is too early to evaluate their research output, three features of this initiative stand out. First, each TCOE was forged through a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Union Department of Telecommunication, a specialized academic institution, and a telecommunication operator.³⁰ This led to the birth of the IITCOE in partnership with IDEA Cellular, VEICET with Vodafone Essar, AIIScCET with Aircel, AICET with Bharti Airtel, BITCOE with BSNL (a public sector entity), TICET with Tata Teleservices, and, last but not least, RJTCOE with Reliance Communications. Second, the profile of host academic institutions chosen by the Ministry was not completely surprising as, predictably, all five of the Indian institutes of technology were involved. While it is a touch unusual for the Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore (known more for its basic science research expertise), the choice to engage the only business school, IIM-A, perhaps reflects an affirmation of, and the desire to strengthen, earlier initiatives there. Third, under the general objectives of capacity building for research and the desire to stimulate an environment of innovation for local needs, each TCOE has been assigned a principal focus area.³¹ While all of this reflects an extremely timely and creative venture, two concerns must be flagged. Since the seven

largest telecommunication operators contribute a major share of the funding for this initiative, it remains to be seen if this will affect the direction and scope of research. Additionally, each TCOE is registered with the state government as a separate entity under the Society's Act – a measure that will greatly help in traversing bureaucratic hurdles so typical of India's university system. Such an organizational structure requires judicious steering in order to prevent its activities from being de-linked from the teaching programs at respective institutions. As long as such knowledge generation is external to its teaching program, it will miss potent opportunities to inspire those who hopefully could be the next generation of policy students.

A healthy move to widen the ambit of institutional deliberation and knowledge generation in communication policy, this equally illustrates a rather unhealthy continuation of the government's view of research as being limited to techno-managerial paradigms. All partner institutions of the TCOE initiative cannot demonstrate an even track record of interdisciplinary orientation. While initiating such a complex and innovative exercise, what has gone amiss is the involvement of an interdisciplinary social science department from a "traditional" university. For the research agendas and capacities of social scientists from disciplines such as anthropology, politics, sociology, and geography urgently need to be recalibrated toward policy-oriented issues in the telecommunication sector. Although there is a slow but perceptible increase in the demand for social scientists with various backgrounds and by transnational media firms operating in India, the social sciences as a whole are far from being even minimally prepared for this. This is what imparts credence to an initiative emerging from the social science domain at the Centre for Culture, Media and Governance (CCMG), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, where this chapter's authors are located. A first such interdisciplinary program in the traditional university system, the CCMG emerged from the erstwhile Communication and Culture Unit in the sociology department of the national university. Configured as a focal point for teaching, research, and policy advocacy in the domain of communication in South Asia, the CCMG recognized that such a vision cannot be realized within existing disciplinary confines that have come to trap the social sciences in Indian universities (Das 2009). Rather than devising its own

rendition of the generic media studies courses, the CCMG's two-year Master's program in "Media Governance," a first at an Asian university, was designed to provide a policy-oriented understanding of the emergent media environment. Concerned about the possibility of a growing divergence between its teaching and research programs, CCMG projects have emerged from and seek to cater to the requirements of its curriculum. While it has forged links with specialized civil society organizations in India and like-minded teaching programs in select foreign universities, it has also given due weight to advocating policy studies in the media in other Indian universities.

Conclusion

Research in the fields of mass communication and media studies in India has been distant historically and almost completely apart from the concerns of media policy. On the one hand, academia often views the creation of and engagement with such knowledge as being exogenous to the scope of research in universities. And for their part, the institutional fulcrums of public policy have failed to stimulate engagement by media scholars and advocates. This has led to a yawning gap in public interest research in the inter-related fields of media advocacy and media policy.

In order to patch over the rupture, we need to encourage the production and dissemination of a diverse literature base on media policy in India. Working toward this would entail a series of small steps. For one, both the government and corporate sectors must be made to realize the positive opportunity costs involved in broadening the universe of media policy scholarship. Government ministries, TRAI, sectoral trade bodies, and non-profit arms of media companies could come together to incubate media policy clusters, initially within, and, thereafter, outside, the university system. Second, rather than viewing the paucity of policy research as a consequence of a lack of will, attention must be directed at the organizational hurdles faced in undertaking this. This may lead to, *inter alia*, devising incentives for graduate students, faculty, and independent scholars to undertake policy research as part of the regular curriculum and research activities, and in collaboration with civil society

organizations. Third, the regulator and trade bodies would benefit by reaching out to and involving academic and advocacy groups in a bottom-up exercise of aggregating micro- and meso-level data on the media landscape. Lastly, all of this would help to prepare the necessary intellectual and organizational resources required to commence teaching programs in media policy. Besides yielding benefits for university students, these programs could also be designed to cater to the needs of advocacy groups and, thereby, systematically build on their experiences and enhance the quality of public discourse over the media.

Global media governance can only gain from conceiving of and operationalizing an intense dialogue between the fulcrums of research and higher education and those of policy-making. But the institutional contours of higher education in India inherited the de-linkage between education and policy which was characteristic of the British colonial model. At the same time, the approach and emphasis in this chapter may be relevant to the general problem of media policy-making in large and diverse industrializing countries. It also reminds us of the earlier stages of challenges and transitions in policy-making in industrialized countries, where radical departures were often propelled by the emergence and role of associations of media scholars – something sorely lacking in India, as in most Asian countries.

Notes

1 Instead of presenting propaganda as merely being misleading information, there is greater purchase in it being interpreted as a combination of "facts, fiction, argument or suggestion" (Taylor 1981: 5). In our context, one illustration of this can be found in Woods (1995).

2 See Barrier (1974: 108) as quoted in Bhattacharya (1997: 140).

3 In order to provide funds and to regulate the standards of teaching and research in universities and colleges, the UGC was established.

4 The ICSSR has also published three decennial surveys of research in India in the field of communication.

5 For a contrasting view, albeit one limited to the information technology/software sector, see Balakrishnan (2006).

6 Covering the transmission and reception of all kinds of data through wired or wireless media (except broadcasting services), its mandate ranged from

recommending the need and timing for introducing new services and service providers, to granting licenses and levying fees, ensuring technical efficiency, protecting consumer interests, and settling disputes within the industry and with the government.

7 See www.tdsat.nic.in.

8 The reasoning for this expanded mandate was two-fold: first, since, like telephony, other sectors also hinged on the transmission and reception of data, as well as disputes over and competition between technological formats, TRAI could play a similar role for sectors other than those in telecommunication. Second, a common regulatory parameter for these diverse sectors and services was the allocation of spectrum to specific segments and to firms within each segment.

9 See Planning Commission (2006: 24).

10 See TRAI (2006: 169). These divisions deal with fixed network; mobile network; converged network; broadcasting and cable services; economic, financial analysis; legal, administrative and personnel; and quality of service.

11 Consultancies include: in the United Kingdom, Analysys Consulting; Spectrum Strategy; and Ovum. The others were conducted by the Centre for Development and Advanced Computing (CDAC), or they were conducted in-house; see TRAI (2006: 161).

12 It must be mentioned that although lawyers play a central role in many aspects related to regulation, the nature of teaching and research in media policy has failed to engage with the rather skewed "legal" character of regulatory politics.

13 For instance, based on industry output and sales data, it seems that the computer games industry is now as important as the film industry, although if one looks for these data or information in national statistics, they do not appear.

14 Prevailing classifications reflect early-twentieth-century forms of industrial production and continue to emphasize primary resources and manufacturing.

15 With regard to audiovisual products, for example, the international market in consumer rights and services certainly exceeds the physical market in value terms, yet documentation on the volume and value of the consumer rights trade is difficult to obtain.

16 The increasing dematerialization of cultural products has made statistical tracking of international trade problematic, despite innovative approaches to trade data assembled as part of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report on the "creative economy"; see UNCTAD/UNDP (2008).

17 In 2008, the Union Department of Personnel and Training commissioned the accounting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers to study the efficacy of the RTI Act. In response, leading RTI activist groups MKSS and NCPRI formed RTI Accountability and Assessment Group to launch an alternative study, with a US$250,000 grant from the Google Foundation. See Chishti (2008); the first findings of the "alternative" study were released in July 2009.

18 With varying regularity, DD tracked the effects of programming and audience behavior through surveys, diaries, interviews, and so on. Much of this tracking involved external personnel, including universities.

19 Two publications have become media industry benchmarks: the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) commissioned by PricewaterhouseCoopers' annual report, and CII commissioned by McKinsey and Company. Sectoral reviews include one-offs like "The Hindi film industry – Business trends and Structural perspectives" by Yes Bank (April 2007), or periodic reports by the Indian Music Industry Association. Among international market research agencies prominent in documenting India is Research and Markets; see Research and Markets (2001).

20 Validity refers to the relationship between theoretical concepts and collected information; coverage refers to the completeness of data sets; and accuracy refers to the correctness or avoidance of errors in data sets; see Herrera and Kapur (2007).

21 This has inspired CCMG to undertake an initiative to search and aggregate policy documents, government reports, and legal case histories on different sectors of the media industry in twentieth-century India.

22 See http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/faculty/centers_telecom.htm.

23 For instance, the Centre for Electronic Governance (CEG) was set up at the IIM-A in October 1999 with support from Oracle India, Hewlett-Packard India, and CMC (Computer Maintenance Corporation). The objectives of CEG include identification of e-governance applications, developing prototypes to demonstrate the feasibility of e-governance, creating best practice cases and toolkits, and undertaking training and dissemination activities. Based on its performance during the initial period, IIM-A pursued the CEG with its own resources, for three more years; see http://www.iimahd.ernet.in/faculty/centers_egov.htm.

24 Research studies cover areas such as defining and clarifying policy objectives, monitoring implementation, tracking experience of deregulation in other countries, and identifying the specifics surrounding competition, investment, and financing.

25 One crucial step was to declare the Planning Commission as the nodal agency for the government–NGO interface within the formal apparatus of the state; see Planning Commission (2002).

26 See www.crforum.in.

27 Focus on the CRF does not dismiss the germination of sub-national advocacy groups, such as the South India Community Media Network and a community radio network within Maharashtra. Irrespective of its current capabilities, the CRF represents the emergence of multiple formations, conceivably spurred by varying interests, within the community radio campaign in India.

28 Evaluations of experiences in Nepal reflect similar trends in the emergence of the Community Radio Support Centre (CRSC), and the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (ACORAB) which specialize, respectively, in capacity-building and advocacy; see Pringle and Subba (2007).

29 See www.tcoe.in.

30 The IIM-A IDEA Centre of Excellence (IITCOE) in Telecommunications at IIM Ahmedabad (October 2007); Vodafone Essar IIT-KGP Centre of Excellence in Telecommunications (VEICET) at IIT Kharagpur (October 2007); Aircel IISc Centre of Excellence in Telecommunications (AIIScCET) at IISc Bangalore (December 2007); Airtel IIT-D Centre of Excellence in Telecommunications (AICET) at IIT Delhi (December 2007) with Bharti Airtel; BSNL IITK Telecom Centre of Excellence (BITCOE) at IIT Kanpur (December 2007) with Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited; Tata IITB Centre of Excellence in Telecommunications (TICET) at IIT Mumbai (December 2007) with Tata Teleservices; and Reliance IITM Centre of Excellence (RITCOE) at IIT Chennai (February 2008) with Reliance Communications.

31 IITCOE on "Telecom Policy, Regulation and Customer Care"; VEICET on "Next Generation Networks and Technology"; AIIScCET on "Information Security and Disaster Management"; AICET on "Telecom Technology and Management"; BITCOE on "Multimedia and Telecom, Cognitive Radio and Computational Mathematics"; TICET on "Rural Applications"; and RITCOE on "Telecom Infrastructure and Energy."

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