

TRENDS IN RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN THE UNITED STATES*

BY

HAMID MOWLANA

In 1956, Bruce Lannes Smith commented that growth in study and writing on international communication in the United States which virtually doubled the literature in a decade could be accounted for mostly by concern for military considerations, along with their economic and political implications.¹ Smith noted a 'cultural lag' in the quality of communications research in the United States: while most studies continued to deal with propaganda and the cold war, world conditions seemed to legislate the redirection of concern to other areas of inquiry. It was Smith's hope that the field acquire greater maturity in dealing with communications in relation to total human and social interaction and motivation. Fifteen years later, one may report progress and an impressive accumulation of knowledge of nearly all aspects of international, comparative and cross-cultural communication.

In the last decade, the comparative and integrated study of social institutions, political behavior, social change, public opinion and mass media has received unprecedented emphasis by the United States scholar.² Among the factors responsible for this trend have been:

1. Post war interest in the developing nations with a concomitant concern for both understanding and promoting modernization.
2. Broader acceptance of the idea that communication analysis provides a perspective through which one can better understand society.
3. The expansion of education and business interests across national boundaries.
4. The sharpening of research and investigatory tools and improved means of collecting, storing, retrieving and sharing data.

Much of the new research has been interdisciplinary. International communication is largely defined today as a specialized area of inquiry

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1. Bruce L. Smith, 'Trends in Research on International Communication and Public Opinion, 1945-1956', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, XX: 1 (Spring 1956), p. 182-195.

2. Hamid Mowlana, *International Communication: A Selected Bibliography* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1971).

upon which a number of behavioral science disciplines converge. All the social sciences can make some contribution to our understanding of the nature and effects of communication and no one discipline is in itself adequate for this task. Ultimately, international communication could comprehend the entire scope of the behavioral sciences. Conversely, a number of cybernetic, general systems, decisionmaking and other communications derivative models and theories have been adopted by the human sciences.

This paper is an attempt to examine and survey the state of knowledge in the field of international communication in the United States. The purpose is to help the community of scholars engaged in this work to see where our collective activity is heading in the hope that this will provide some direction for the future research and studies.

Criteria for Including Works in the Study

In selecting works dealing with international communication no distinction was made between historical, analytical, or empirical and quantitative studies. In considering the criteria for including works in the sample, it was decided that the selected studies should include at least one of the following:

1. contribute valuable descriptive and theoretical material on comparative, and cross-cultural communication;
2. display considerable data about international communication;
3. show methodological implications in international communication;
4. describe the structure and operation of a national communication system, and
5. finally be used and cited in international communication teaching and literature extensively.

The term of international communication has been used in this study in a rather broad sense. It is not restricted to international political communication and campaigns by governments, but it includes such varied activities as international mass communication and news agency activities, impact of mass media across cultures, communication activities of non-governmental organizations and the international contacts of students, scholars, tourists, and technical assistants. Thus, included in the survey were the studies that treated communication as a major aspect of their analytical schemes, or in describing social and political processes by means of abstract concepts and models paid explicit attention to communication problems.

Various journals and readers whose attention is in some way devoted to international communication were searched for studies fitting the

criteria. Among the journals were *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Journalism Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of International Affairs*, *Gazette: International Journal of Mass Communication Studies* (The Netherlands), *Journal of Communication* and various other social science journals, primarily in the field of political science, psychology and sociology. A total of 1,427 studies — including books, monographs, readers, and journals articles — covering the period 1850 to 1970 were surveyed. While this survey did not list every piece of international communication research, it was hoped that the selection was representative of the work done over the past century and that all the major and substantive works that fit the criteria were coded. For the purpose of identifying the major areas of interest, the studies were categorized under three broad themes:

1. studies in specific culture and/or geographical areas of the world;
2. theoretical studies of international communication and various applications; and
3. studies of channels of international communication.

The growth of the literature was compared over a century with particular attention and emphasis to the last two decades: 1950-1970.

Patterns of Development

The decade of the 1960's has witnessed an impressive accumulation of knowledge about almost every aspect of international communication. More than half of the studies coded — 749 of 1,427, or 52 percent — were written between 1960 and 1969. Of these, 279 studies were written in specific areas — discussing the structure and operations of the country or region's communication systems — among which studies of West European countries, Canada and Oceania ranked first with 87 new publications. Of the other categories, Communication and National Development which included studies in communication and socio-political development and such items as communication and the diffusion of innovation topped the list in the 1960's with 112 new works, followed by Regulations and Laws in International Communication with 63 and International Communicator and Foreign Correspondent studies with 58 (Table 1).

Looking at it another way, almost half (48%) of the literature is in five fields: Western Europe (total 157 studies), Communication and National Development (total 149), Propaganda and Public Opinion (total 142), Regulations and Laws (total 128), and International Communicator (total 106).

The rapid increase in literature concerning international communications in the last two decades indicates that while the early period of growth has become a part of the past, the present research is also af-

fectured by historical events.³ Indeed, studies in specific cultural and geographical areas have corresponded roughly to United States involvement in those areas. This factor of involvement seems to have influenced heavily what domestic studies have been undertaken and what foreign works translated.⁴

It is important to note that growth of the literature in a new field seems independent of the amount of previous literature. However, the respectable growth rates of the Western European category and the international communicator category in the 1960's, neither a new field, and both rebounding from a relative decline in the 1950's, tend to counteract such a theory. Also, studies of Africa were relatively new in the 1950's, but achieved a rate of increase only slightly (two and a half points) above the norm. Although a new field may obtain a high rate of literature increase, sustained growth occurs only when factors outside the existing literature make the field attractive to researchers. Perhaps the major generalization which can be made from this quantitative analysis is that the pattern of growth of the literature in a category does *not* depend on the number of works previously written in the field.

The total literature in each of these two decades slightly more than doubled, as the figures for the decades (55 percent for the 1950's and 52 percent for the 1960's) indicate. These two figures, taken the norm for each decade with a normative range of plus or minus five percent, give a basis for comparative analysis. Area studies are all grouped close to the normal range during both decades. The greatest deviations above the norm in this category are in the fields of African and Middle Eastern studies (since these have small base numbers, 38 and 30 respectively, this deviation must be regarded with caution). The Asian studies show a slightly above-average growth in the 1960's, indicating a more

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3. Richard L. Merritt, ed., *Communication in International Politics* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1972). See Merritt's chapter on 'Transmissions of Values across National Boundaries'.

4. Representative of those in different fields whose work have direct bearing on both international and comparative communication systems are Davison, Schramm, Pool, Schiller, Fischer, Merrill, Markham, Olson, Inkeles, Mowlana, and Nixon. Significant contribution has been made in the area of communication and foreign policy by such scholars as Kelnan, Boulding, Cohen, Almond, Rosenau, Pool, Merritt, Deutsch and White. Among the political scientists who stress communication as a key function common to all politics are Almond and Colman, Pyc, Apter, and Fagen. Still, others have dealt with communication and the development process from the standpoint of a wide variety of discipline and perspectives, among them: Schramm, Lerner, Eisenstadt, Rogers, Frey, Katz, Lazarsfeld, Mead, and McClelland. And then, there are the studies that look at communication and development from the standpoint of particular media and a single country. Among the literature of this area are the works of Deutschmann, McNelly, Mowlana, Rao, and Mosel. For bibliographical reference see Hamid Mowlana, *International Communication: A selected Bibliography* (Dubuque: Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1971).

Table 1. Trends in Publications of Works in International Communication, 1950-1970

Subject	Total number of publications for the years between:						
	1850-99	1900-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69
<i>Specific Culture and/or Geographical Areas</i>							
Africa	0	0	0	1	2	5	30
Asia	0	1	3	5	5	21	51
Communist Countries	0	0	0	10	5	24	31
Latin America	0	0	5	6	3	12	19
Middle East	0	0	0	0	0	5	25
Western Europe	1	0	4	14	20	31	87
Canada & Oceania, United States	0	0	2	3	13	20	36
Total	1	1	14	39	48	118	279
<i>Theoretical Studies and Applications</i>							
Theoretical Basis of Communication	1	1	7	6	17	32	20
Communication and Foreign Policy	0	0	2	5	4	24	45
Public Opinion and Propaganda	0	0	2	30	30	39	41
Cross-Cultural Communication	0	0	0	3	2	18	37
Communication and National Development	0	0	0	4	0	33	112
Total	1	1	11	48	53	146	255
<i>Communication Channels</i>							
International News Communication	0	0	3	9	7	28	32
Laws and Regulations Communication and Space Technology	0	1	4	5	14	41	63
International Communicator and Foreign Correspondents	0	0	0	16	14	18	58
General Channels	0	0	0	4	0	12	31
Total	0	1	7	34	35	99	195
<i>Bibliographies & Source Reviews</i>							
	0	0	0	4	7	10	20
Total	2	3	32	125	143	373	749

Table 2. Communication Systems — Geographical Areas

Area	1850-99		1900-19		1920-29		1930-39		1940-49		1950-59		1960-69	
	n^*	t^*	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t
Africa	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	3	5	8	30	38
Asia	0	0	1	1	3	4	5	9	5	14	21	35	51	86
Communist Countries	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	5	15	24	39	31	70
Latin America	0	0	0	0	5	5	6	11	3	14	12	26	19	45
Middle East	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	25	30
Western Europe, Canada, NZ & A	1	1	0	1	4	5	14	19	20	39	31	70	87	157
United States	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	5	13	18	20	39	36	74
Total	1	1	1	2	14	16	39	55	48	103	118	221	279	500

n^* = number of new works produced within the decade or time period.

t^* = total number of works available at the end of each decade (sum total of all previous figures under n).

Table 3. *Communication Theory and Applications*

Category	1850-99		1900-19		1920-29		1930-39		1940-49		1950-59		1960-69	
	n^*	t^*	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t
Theoretical Bases Communication &	1	1	1	2	7	9	6	15	17	32	32	64	20	84
Foreign Policy	0	0	0	0	2	2	5	7	2	11	24	35	45	80
Propaganda & Public Opinion	0	0	0	0	2	2	30	32	30	62	39	101	41	142
Cross-Cultural Communication	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	2	5	18	23	37	60
Communication & National Development	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	4	33	37	112	149
Total	1	1	1	2	11	13	48	61	53	114	146	260	255	515

n^* = number of new works produced within the decade or time period.

t^* = total number of works available at the end of each decade (sum total of all previous figures under n).

Table 4. *Channels of International Communication*

Category	1850-99		1900-19		1920-29		1930-39		1940-49		1950-59		1960-69	
	n^*	t^*	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t	n	t
General Communication Systems	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	0	4	12	16	31	47
Regulations & Law in International Communication	0	0	1	1	4	5	5	10	14	24	41	65	63	128
Communicator & Foreign Corresp. Communication & the Space Age	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	16	14	30	18	48	58	106
International News Communication	0	0	0	0	3	3	9	12	7	19	28	47	32	79
Total	0	0	1	1	7	8	34	42	35	77	99	176	195	371

t^* = number of new works produced within the decade or time period.

n^* = total number of works available at the end of each decade (sum total of all previous figures under n).

Table 5. Literature Increase in Each Field Compared to Overall Increase — 1950's and 1960's

$$\text{Percentage of works written in decade} = \frac{\text{Number of new works written in decade}}{\text{Total number available at end of decade}} = \frac{n}{t}$$

— computed for 1959 and 1969

Category	Percentage Written in decade		Difference from norm	
	1950's	1960's	1950's norm = .55 ± .05	1960's norm = .52 ± .05
Overall	55	52		
<i>Communication Systems:</i>				
<i>Geographical Areas</i>				
Africa	62.5	79	+ .075	+ .27
Asia	60	60	+ .05	+ .08
Communist Countries	62	44	+ .07	— .08
Latin America	46	42	— .09	— .10
Middle East	—	83	—	+ .31
Western Europe, etc	44	55	— .11	+ .03
United States	53	49	— .02	— .03
<i>Communication Theory and Applications:</i>				
Theoretical Bases	50	24	— .05	— .28
Communication & Foreign Policy	69	56	+ .14	+ .04
Propaganda & Public Opinion	39	29	— .16	— .23
Cross-Cultural Communication	78	62	+ .23	+ .10
Communication & National Development	89	75	+ .34	+ .23
<i>Channels of International Communication</i>				
General Communication				
Systems	75	66	+ .20	+ .14
Laws and Regulations	63	49	+ .03	— .03
International Communicator & Foreign Correspondents	37.5	58	— .175	+ .06
Communication & the Space Age	—	—	—	—
International News Communication	60	41	+ .05	— .11

than continuing interest in that area. The growth in these three areas is in some correspondence with the area of communication and national development.

On the other hand, studies of the communist countries have moved from above the average range to below it in two decades, while studies of Western Europe have moved in the opposite direction, from below to above the norm. Those of the United States and Latin America have remained steady, the U.S. falling within the average and Latin America below the average consistently.

In the category of communication theory and applications, the two fields of cross-cultural communication and national development show the most drastic rate of growth. Literature in cross-cultural communications more than doubled in the 1960's; that in communication and national development almost tripled. The fields of theoretical bases of communication and propaganda and public opinion have declined in their growth rate as much as national development category has increased. Studies of foreign policy showed a brief increase in the 1950's, and fell back within the average range in the 1960's. Even in those with declining rates of growth, it must be remembered that the total number of studies in the field did increase in absolute numbers.

The increased interest in the systems approach is evident with reference to the channels of international communication. The international communicator category has benefited while the international new category has suffered. The fluctuation in the growth rate on regulations and laws was almost minimal relative to the overall literature growth, deviating only slightly from the normal range.

As new fields enter competition for scholarly attention, scholarly effort has become more diffuse. The diffusion of effort and consequent tendency of literature growth in all categories toward the normal range of growth can be seen in the percentages of the total literature which advanced faster or more slowly than the norm. In 1959, 33 percent advanced faster, 27 percent was within the norm, and 36 percent was in categories falling below the norm of growth. In 1969, 36 percent advanced faster, 29 percent more slowly, but 31 percent was within the norm. About three percent of the literature was not considered here in either decade. It seems clear from the foregoing analysis that growth in each particular category is dictated more by interests outside the academic field and/or by the development of research techniques within the field and in academically-allied fields than by available literature in the field.

As for the early growth of the literature, it was largely a response to at least three historical influences as pointed out by Bobrow:

The first of these involved metatheories about human behavior; the second, international competition and conflict circumstances; the third, state changes in media technology. The content of research fluctuated as the influences fluctuated but it did not overcome their inherent properties. The influences did not have a unifying intellectual structure; the metatheories provided no apparatus resembling deductive theory; the historical events did not present themselves to the analyst in terms which surmounted unique situations.⁵

There are two major considerations in delineating the future prospects in the fields of international communication: factors relating to the attractiveness of the research areas, and the education of students in the field. The growth of the field of international communication in American Universities has been documented in the recent collection of articles and papers which examine the state of education in international and comparative communication over a fifteen year period.⁶ The study finds a number of academic approaches to the study of international communication, which, in an interesting way, parallels the findings of this paper on the growth of literature in the field. The approaches cited are:

1. The role and uses of communication in the new diplomacy, which stresses communication as influence exerted by individuals, groups, and government on foreign policy decisions.
2. International political communication which tends to concentrate on professional techniques of international persuasion or on interpersonal and mass communication.
3. The behavioral approach which seeks to understand international relations in terms of individual and group behavior theory.
4. Communication approach developed in the schools of journalism, communication, and speech which emphasizes the area of the study for the professional writer, journalist and broadcaster.

Since the categories of educational approaches to the study of international communication parallel the development of the literature, it would be well to return to the trends of the literature to determine what are the areas of need and what are the indicators of interest in each category.

There is no strict division on the growth charts between theoretical and specific investigatory categories in so far as literature increase rate is concerned. As noted earlier, the highest concentrations of literature are in the area of national development, a fairly theoretical category, and in Western Europe and related areas, a fairly non-theoretical cate-

5. Davis Bobrow, 'Transfer of Meaning Across National Boundaries'. In Richard Merritt ed., *Communication in International Politics*.

6. James Markham, ed., *International Communication as a Field of Study* (Iowa City, Iowa: Publications Department of the University of Iowa, 1970).

gory. Nonetheless, the highest sustained growth rates can be found in communications theory and its applications, indicating a trend toward consolidation of facts gathered over the last two decades into new and/or more comprehensive theories in these categories.

Continued American involvement in Asia should stimulate further interest in the area. The growing international importance of China should give a boost to Asian studies. If the Middle Eastern situation continues to be threatening and (events give no indication that it will be otherwise), a continued upsurge in Middle Eastern studies is to be expected. Latin American studies, on the other hand, may not show any great growth. African studies will probably increase greatly because of a growing emphasis at many universities in that area, especially where Black or African studies departments are established.

The new fields of national development and cross-cultural communication also seem to be a product of the widening international interests of the United States in the past two decades. Further growth in these areas may continue to depend on outside factors. Much of the national development studies and the foreign policy studies will probably be evaluations of previous theories and applications and development of new methods in these fast-changing categories. It is likely that growth in communication systems research and its related fields of international communication will parallel these developments. The new field of space age communications and technology will undoubtedly begin to take hold as nations begin to utilize and recognize more fully the opportunities provided by communications satellites. Finally, the trends of the future, then, like those of the past could be discerned by the application of an observed rule in this paper: United States interests and involvements in world events generate scholarly studies as much as methodological and research developments.

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