UNIT- 3: COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

UNIT STRUCTURE

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- Discuss the meaning of communication research
- Explain the element of communication research
- Analyse the importance of research in mass media
- Name the various types of communication research

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In the earlier unit we have discussed the various types of research, such as, quantitative and qualitative researches and the differences among them. The unit then, dealt with the research methods, like the survey method, case study method, experimental method, historical methods etc. Finally, in that unit we have discussed on the research process step by step.

This unit introduces the meaning, definition and various aspects of Communication Research. It will also discuss the importance of communication research and mass media research. Elements of communication research are also included in our discussion in the unit.

The next unit, i.e. unit – 14 will intend to highlight the importance of

the commercialization of culture and the rule of media in maintaining power structures. We feel proud that the noted Assamese singer and the great son of the country Dr. Bhupen Hazarika did his doctoral research on mass communication in the later part of 1940's.



LET US KNOW

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika completed his B. A. in 1944 and his M. A. in Political Science in 1946 from Banaras Hindu University. Soon after, he left for New York, USA where he lived for five years and received his doctorate (PhD) in Mass Communication from Columbia University. He also received the Lisle Fellowship from Chicago University, USA to study the use of educational project development through cinema.

3.3.2 Meaning

Let us now discuss the meaning of the communication research. Zeam Folkerts and Stephen Lacy in their book "The Media in your Life- An Introduction to Mass Communication" has defined the mass communication research in these words : "Mass communication research involve the systematic study of media content, the forces that shape its creation, how and why people use media, and the impact of media content and media institutions on individuals and society". The researchers of the discipline have developed a systematic study of media contents. The reason for conducting communication research varies with the researcher and the funding organization of the research.

Mass communication research basically is an art of scientific investigation or an in-depth academic activity that lays stress on the various aspects of mass communication. It includes not only an in-depth investigation of theoretical aspects of mass communication but also a wide ranging inter-disciplines such as television, radio, newspaper, folk and traditional communication forms, advertising, public relations campaign, effectiveness of programmes, audience behavior and so on.

3.4 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Folkerts and Lacy state that the communication research begins with a paradigm, which is a set of assumptions about the nature of human behaviour. A variety of paradigms are available for scholars to use. Two paradigms dominate mass communication research. One is social science approach, which emphasizes on the use of theories building and empirical measurement to learn about human behaviors. The other approach is the critical approach that seeks an understanding of issues that are raised by connections between media and society.

The communication research can be broadly divided into two types. One is basic research and the other is the practical research.

(a) Basic Communication Research: As its name indicates it is the basic communication research that deals with the development of a theory. This type of research is carried out by the communication scholars or the researcher to develop theories and to examine various phenomena, exploring the relationship between the people and the media. For example, we can mention some research on conflict reporting and the impact of the community based reports on the general civilians. Another example, we can mention here is the impact or the effectiveness of some good programmes on children.

(b) Practical research: We know that applied research aims at finding a solution for an immediate problem facing a society or an organization. Practical communication research can be compared with the concept of applied research. Media organizations conduct practical research in an effort to understand what content and services their audiences want and need. The goal of this types of research is to predict the consumer behavior for the media organizations to increase their audience. The film industry conducts research to determine the popularity of heroes and heroines. Folberts and Lacy stated that the same research topic can be examined by the basic and practical research. To determine how advertising affects voting can be considered as a basic research when it is done by political scientist or can be considered as a practical research when it is done by campaign consultants.

They said that mass communication research begins with a paradigm, which is a set of assumptions about the nature of human



LET US KNOW

Willbur Schramm

Internationally known communication researcher Willbur Schramm's contribution to the field is remarkable. He wrote more than one hundred research articles and books. He conducted extensive research in a many parts of the world including Asia, Africa, Samoa, India, Israel etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Fill in the blanks-

a. The communication research can be broadly divided into two types, one is .....and the other is the .....

b. Basic communication research deals with the.....

c. Practical communication research can be compared with the concept of.....research.

d. We can divide the approach of communication research into two -.....and.....

3.5 IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH AND MASS MEDIA

Media stands for the tools or channels of communication. We have different types of media such as traditional forms, print, electronic etc. The main purpose of this media is to provide education information and entertainment to the target audience. To know the likings and disliking, needs and requirements of the target audience research is of much importance for media of mass communication. Except the public sector media, we know that almost all other media organizations are owned by private organization and profit making is the guiding principle of the private media organizations. For offering different media content to a heterogeneous audience, the media organizations always lay their stress on innovative

modern media could make possible a truly democratic community. Moderate effects research started in US in 1970's wherein it was found that media content had a greater impact on people's behavior than limited effects studies suggested, but the impact was not as great as was found by the *powerful effects researchers*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4. What do you mean by media?

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Q5. Name some types of media.

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Q6. Who developed the *cultivation theory?*

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Q7. Who developed the *magic bullet theory*?

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3.6 ELEMENTS OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Winner and Dominic in their book *Mass Media Research* said that there are four basic elements of communication research. These are –

1. **Concept and constructs**: A *concept* is an abstract idea found by generalizing from particulars and summarizing related observations. Concepts are important in a communication research, because they simplify the research process by combining particular characteristics, objects or people into more general categories. Secondly, it simplifies communication among those who have a shared understanding of them. A *construct* has *three* basic characteristics. *First* of all, it is an abstract idea that is usually broken down into dimensions represented by lower level concepts. We can say that construct is a combination of concept. *Secondly*, a construct cannot be observed directly. *Lastly*, a construct

launched within a short period. Then the media organization may conduct a survey as to what kind of programmes the target audience want to watch or what types of news they want to read in a newspaper. After analyzing the collected data from the survey, the media organization prepares the programmes or the news sections depending on the feed forward. It is widely used to determine the nature of programmes/news.

Basically, feed forward means the response about a certain event or activity being carried out which is acquired in advance by utilizing different methods.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q8. What are the four basic elements of communication research?

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Q9. Who wrote the book *Mass Media Research?*

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Q10. What is the meaning of 'feed forward'?

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3.6 ROLE OF COMPUTER IN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Though a computer is nothing but a device that computes, now it can do anything. Computer technology has undergone a significant change over the period of last five decades. The present day microcomputer is far more powerful and cost effective compared to the world's first computers. The following are the important characteristics-

1. Speed: Computers can perform calculations in just a few seconds for which human beings would need a few days to do by hand.
2. Storage: We can store crores of phases and other programmes in a computer storage device.
3. The accuracy of a computer is consistently high.

So, we have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the internet research to complete a media or a communication project.

Computer and internet are very useful in this field and if we properly use the internet for any kind of media or communication research it can reduce the time, cost, labour and we may expect quality researches utilizing this new media.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS – E

1. What is a computer?

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2. What are the main characteristics of a computer?

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3. Define the term internet.

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3.7 LET US SUM UP

- Mass communication research was started during the first two decades into the twentieth century. During the 1920's and 1930's researchers concluded that mass media had powerful effect on individual human behavior. From the 1940's through the 1960's, in the United States, the researchers took the opposite track and argued that the effects of mass media on people were limited. During this time, researchers also began to explore the factors that influence media content. After the 1970's, research into content influence began to grew enormously.
- Mass communication research basically is an art of scientific investigation or an in-depth academic activity that lays stress on the various aspects of mass communication. It includes not only an in-depth investigation of the theoretical aspects of mass communication but also

two types, one is basic research and the other is the practical research.

b. Basic communication research deals with the development of a theory.

c. Practical communication research can be compared with the concept of applied research.

d. We can divide the approach of communication research into two— social science approach and critical approach.

C.

Ans to Q No 1: Media stands for the tools or channels of communication.

Ans to Q No 2: Newspaper, radio, television are some examples of media.

Ans to Q No 3: George Garbner.

Ans to Q No 4: Harold Laswell

D.

Ans to Q No 1: The following are the four basic elements of communication research-

- Concept and constructs
- Measurement
- Variables
- Scale

Ans to Q No 2 : Wimmer and Dominic wrote the book *Mass Media Research.*

Ans to Q No 3: Technically 'feed forward' is a term describing an element or pathway within a control system when it passes a controlling signal from a source in the control systems external operator to a load elsewhere in its external environment.

E.

Ans to Q No 1: A computer is a machine that manipulates data according to a set of instructions.

Ans to Q No 2: The following are the important characteristics-

1. Speed: Computers can perform calculations in just a few second that human beings would need, a few days to do by hand.
2. Storage: We can store crores of phases and other programmes in a computer storage device.
3. The accuracy of a computer is consistently high.