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## UNIT 2 CLASSIFICATION OF RESEARCH

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### Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Learning Outcomes
- 2.2 Classification of Communication Research
  - 2.2.1 Based on Design
  - 2.2.2 Based on Stage
  - 2.2.3 Based on Nature
  - 2.2.4 Based on Location
  - 2.2.5 Based on Approach
- 2.3 Study of Elements in Communication
  - 2.3.1 Communicators
  - 2.3.2 Media Content
  - 2.3.3 Distribution
  - 2.3.4 Audiences
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 References and Further Readings
- 2.6 Check Your Progress: Possible Answers

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### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

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Research is the Central point in the domain of Development Communication. In the previous unit, we discussed the concept, nature and scope of research. In this unit, we shall discuss various classifications of communication research. The communication process in terms of its elements such as sender-message/ channel-receivers-feedback can be researched at various levels. We shall explain how communication research can be examined using various lenses in terms of design, stage, nature, location, and approaches to research human communication.

How a given research project is done can be described in many ways. For instance, the way in which you plan to design your research is one way. Similarly, when you conduct your research or the 'stage' of research, i.e. before, during, or after a project, can be another way to classify it. A third way to classify research is by the reason for which it is done - for what purpose or objective is the project undertaken. A fourth way to classify research is by the location in which it is carried out - in the field or in a laboratory. A fifth way of classifying research is by locating it within a discipline, i.e. in agriculture, psychology, political science, or sociology, among others. Yet another way to classify research is based on the theoretical approaches with the field, i.e. structural, behavioural, or critical. How you approach a research project often defines the broad methodologies that are followed. Finally, we can also study four broad aspects of communication research- communicators, media content, distribution and consumption by audiences.

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### 2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

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After reading this unit you should be able to:

- analyse various classifications of research;
- describe possible approaches to communication research; and
- examine ways of doing research within media and communication discipline.

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## 2.2 CLASSIFICATION OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

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Communication research can be examined from various strands and there is no single way to classify it. Different experts in communication classify approaches to research differently. The ways of looking at it can be based on how you wish to examine it. The design, stage, nature, location and approach are some of the ways to classify communication research. Let us discuss each of them in detail. there may be some overlap. However, because despite the best efforts, communication research cannot be placed only in one classification. The ways of looking at communication research projects depend largely upon the objectives and expected outcomes of your research study.

For the purpose of this course, we shall follow the classification used by two well known communication scholars, Roger Wimmer and Joseph Dominick in their book “Mass Media Research: An Introduction” since their approach is most relevant for the studies you may be conducting. They have examined applications of communication research into print media, electronic media, advertising and public relations, Internet and effects research. Media research is a very significant part of communication research.

### 2.2.1 Based on Design

Research design is a philosophical framework whereas method is a more tangible way to undertake research process. If we examine communication research designs there can be broadly four categories - descriptive, diagnostic, exploratory, and experimental. Historical or archival methods too can be part of any of these four categories.

#### **Descriptive**

When we want to describe a phenomenon under study, it is called a descriptive design. Let us say, we want to describe how people watch television or what happens when people watch film in the theatre or how do children deal with the mobile phones of their parents - all these are possible descriptions of individuals interaction with media.

#### **Diagnostic**

This design refers to understanding cause-effect association or solving a problem on hand. For example, if there is drop in the viewership of a show or there is a sudden rise in the usage of mobile data, the researcher can find out the reasons by using appropriate research methods. Most of the diagnostic studies are applied in nature.

#### **Exploratory**

There are occasions when variables are unknown or the phenomenon under study is a new development. In such a case, the researcher can use an exploratory design. This design provides flexibility for study and helps in the process of

identifying variables for future research. Exploratory studies provide the basic information upon which we can sharpen our research questions, identify our variables and state our hypotheses. When preliminary information is not readily available, exploratory research is found useful.

### **Experimental**

In Experimental designs, the researcher can control and manipulate the situation in order to observe a phenomenon under study. This type of research can be conducted in a laboratory, in an online environment or even in real life field conditions. Experimental research can be of many types which are described in detail in Unit 9 of this course. An experimental design is useful if you want to analyse the extent to which a film on HIV/AIDS helps improve knowledge about the disease among subjects exposed to the film. The difference between what they knew before they saw the film and what they learned after the film, can tell you how effective the film you showed them was.

### **Historical**

Historical designs are based on archival material. Historical research is also being used in communication research. For example, if you study the letters between Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter, Indira Gandhi, it will help you understand various aspects of political and social life of that era. Media histories, audience experiences, memory research are some of the examples of historical designs within communication research.

### **2.2.2 Based on Stage**

You can take the context of time of communication as an aspect of research. Based on the stage of communication, research can be classified as pre-communication (Formative), during communication (Process) and post communication (Summative) research. The Development Educational Communication Unit of Indian Space Research Organisation (DECU-ISRO) Ahmedabad pioneered this approach for most of its development communication projects starting with Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in 1975.

#### **Formative Research**

Formative research is undertaken before any communication project is created in order to define the audience - for whom the communication is intended; the content - what will be the content, and the presentation - how will that content be communicated what will be the language, and so on. You will need to make decisions about the locale or language or set design or clothing or social-psychological-economic milieu of the content. For example, if you want to make a film about Mahatma Gandhi, you will have to research about clothing of that period, sets, his writings, possible locales, audience understanding, what you wish to convey through your film and many such things. All these constitute formative research which then serves as information inputs into the programme planning.

The E-PG Pathshala project of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has courseware for MA in Communication Studies under Social Sciences. There are chapters on Formative-Process-Summative research as a part of their Development Communication paper. You can read about

formative research in detail on URL: <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/ahl.php?csmo=24> for a better understanding of how formative research can contribute to making communication effective.

### **Process Research**

Information is needed when a communication project is in progress. For example, there is a need to know what is being communicated in terms of content, how is it being received, what are the contexts of reception, and what do audiences do when they receive communication. Such questions are addressed by process research. You may choose to take a telephone survey and ask randomly which programme is being watched by people when a particular television programme is being telecast and the finding will reveal if the programme you were researching is being watched or not. Various scholars have studied the telecasts of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharata* serials on Doordarshan during 1980s and found that people remained indoors and roads were empty at the time of telecast. People offered prayers when they sat in front of television sets and treated the actors of these serials as demi-gods and even asked for their blessings. The findings of process research may help in correcting problems, making changes in content and format, and in general, fine-tuning the communication project as per audience needs.

### **Summative Research**

Unlike formative and process research, summative research is undertaken after the communication programme is completed. There are many reasons for conducting summative research. Often, we need to know the extent to which a communication project met the objectives for which it was designed; how effective the project has been; was the money well spent; and finally, should the project be modified or stopped or continued in a different form. There may be mixed results and summative research helps to understand what succeeded, what failed, and why. For example, summative research conducted after SITE (mentioned earlier in this unit) helped in many ways for future planning. Current work in development communication in India has its roots in the research carried out during SITE. Usually for a communicator, summative research serves as an investment for next communication project.

You can read more about summative research on URL: <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/ahl.php?csmo=24>.

## **2.2.3 Based on Nature**

Research can be carried out for the purpose of policy or prior to production (Pre-production), during production, during telecast, post telecast. This classification of communication research may not be used for a specific programme but for a group of programmes. It may be undertaken by a communication agency or by third party agencies to define the larger goals of communication.

### **Policy**

Research is undertaken to provide inputs for policy level decisions. For example, it can examine if people have stopped watching television? Is mobile phone the only way to reach out to young audiences? Are films in cinema hall being watched mainly by middle-aged people so the themes need to be serious in nature and not mere love stories? Communication planners can address such questions in order

to make decisions about their communication plans as part of large national programmes such as Rural Health Mission and so on.

### **Pre-Production**

Similar to formative research for a particular communication project, pre-production research is undertaken prior to the production of a programme or series of programmes. Pre-production research, as the name suggests aims to decide matters related to communication, audiences and even message. Pre-production research includes deciding target audience, story, script, and production related decisions about locations-sets-costumes-casting-property, pilot testing, and so on.

### **Production**

This type of research is done when production is in progress. You may be aware that while production is in progress, the communicator may be required to make changes in the original plans. It may be to do with resources as costs planned earlier increase, actors are not available, new things are added on the spot or there may be changes while executing the production or even practical considerations while work is in progress. Production research helps in keeping a planned process under check and can also help in monitoring of work.

### **Monitoring of Telecast**

Similar to process research which we discussed earlier, telecast research is when the communication telecast is in progress. For example, producers of television entertainment programmes often rely on audience viewership figures for deciding whether to change the script, change characters, extend a entertainment serial, or even when to end a programme. For example, when a character in a popular serial died or was killed by the producers because the actor left the show, people came to the streets and demanded that he should be brought back. Researchers have also noted that people watching religious serials touch the television screen and pray to the god/goddess characters in the serial! Such findings were possible due to telecast research. Visit of film makers to theatres to ascertain the audience response and other tools such as Peoples' meters or Television Audience Measurement are used by broadcasters to monitor telecasts.

### **Post-telecast**

Like summative research, post-telecast research is undertaken to examine how communication is received, what was audience feedback, should there be any changes in communication for future, and so on. Post-telecast research is usually used in electronic media in order to understand issues for the next production.

It is important to understand that research serves as an important investment for a media organisation. For example, if a newspaper finds its circulation has gone up after introducing a new feature page, they may start charging more for advertising; and their incomes would go up as a consequence. Further, post-production research for a particular project can become pre-production research for the next production. Similarly pre-production research which helps in production can be useful in examining production process and can contribute to post-production processes.

## 2.2.4 Based on Location

Research can also be classified in terms of location - field research, laboratory experiments or field experiments.

### Field research

Field research as the name suggests is carried out in locations. Going to a village would become a necessity for an organisation which wants to know if Wi-Fi is available in a village, what is the strength of the signal, and what kind of facilities are available for men and women to access the Internet. Such kind of information cannot be collected from a laboratory or a bookstore. Field research is carried out where the activity is actually taking place - the field can be home or a work place or an educational institution of the respondent. Most of the social science research is generally carried out in the field because a laboratory is controlled and cannot describe the real life situation. Variety of methods are used in the field, e.g. surveys, observations, and other ethnographic methods described in detail in Block 2 and 3 of this course.

### Laboratory Experiments

Experiments are conducted in controlled environments created by the researcher as per the requirements of the respective research project. There can be varied types of experimental designs employed depending upon the requirements of respective research. The most commonly used method is pre-post design or control group-experiment designs. Laboratory experiments are extensively used in medical and pharmaceutical research; but they are also used in communication research. For instance, an experiment can be carried out for the pilot testing of a TV programme or an advertisement to see how effective it is likely to be, when launched. If it is not effective, then it is cast aside. Lab experiments are also conducted extensively in educational communications, when the project managers want to see if the content of the programme is useful for the target audience or not.

### Field experiments

Field experiments are those where the researcher goes to the field and conducts experiments in the field itself to observe an intervention/experiment being undertaken. You may study about SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment), JDCP (Jhabua Development Communication Project) which are examples of field experiments to analyse the role of satellite technology for social change. These experiments have used research to design communication, made changes based on research and undertaken evaluations to ascertain influence of such experiments.

## 2.2.5 Based on Approach

As discussed earlier, communication research is a multi-disciplinary subject. It borrows research methods from anthropology, sociology, psychology, economics, and political science and so on. Based on the approach undertaken by the researcher, there can be four strands - Structural, Functional, Behavioural, and Cultural/Critical.

## Structural

Structural or Structuralism borrows from sociology, anthropology, literary criticism, architecture, psychology and linguistics. Structure means interrelated parts of a system, e.g. how the communication content is structured. Philosopher Simon Blackburn (2008) defines structuralism as “the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture”.

In order to understand structuralism, let us take an example from language. In linguistics (language as science of signs) we examine how pattern of words communicate meaning. As you know “I love you” and “I love you?” do not mean same thing in spite of the fact that both the sentences use the same words. The meaning will change just by changing the sequence of words or putting a question mark or an exclamation mark. Similarly in visual media, the composition or the sequencing of visuals communicates the message. The structural approach to research in communication examines how shots have been ordered in the film, how sequence of words in radio is changing the presentation, what has been the presentation in television show and how different genres of programming get influenced by structure. The Structural approach examines sequence, grouping, and patterns etc. and the change in sequence can lead to change in meaning in the context of media communication.

Language is a sign system of communication in human society and tells us many things about its speaker hence words spoken by a character can reveal a lot about him/her. Researchers using structuralism examine structural elements of the message in order to reach their conclusions. For example, researcher analysing the portrayal of women in films will examine camera angles, length of the shots, frames, the sequence of presentation, the relational difference in men versus women and so on. If certain parts of women’s body are focused upon more; then a different meaning will be attributed to such a portrayal.

## Functional

This research classification examines what are the functions of communication. Uses and gratification theory is an example of functional approach to communication research as it examines the ‘why’ of communication. Why do people watch television, why do they keep watching the same film number of times, why do people keep listening to music even while they are on a busy road. Uses and gratification provides a useful framework to understand the ‘why’ of media consumption. The theory notes that there are: cognition, diversion, social utility, affiliation, expression, and withdrawal functions of media use by individuals. To take the above example of portrayal of women in films, if the researcher is using a functional approach, s/he will examine- what is the character given to women in the story line, how does her character take the story further, what the woman does in the film- is she within or outside the house- what is she doing- what kind of clothes is she wearing- what is she speaking and so on. If the functions given to women are ornamental or passive, then it may suggest that the portrayal of women in that particular film is cosmetic in nature and not significant.

Communication is also considered a behavioural science. Communication helps the receivers know about the issues, help in changing their attitudes about the issues and finally change their practices. But it may not always be in that order. For example, people are aware that ‘smoking is injurious to health’, but even then they smoke. The social awareness campaigns generally use fear appeal to stress that you will get cancer because you smoke. Now, if all the viewers who saw that campaign get impacted by the communication, everyone should have quit smoking but that does not happen and only a few people get influenced by the campaign. A behavioural approach on the importance of ‘No Smoking’ campaign will examine which members quit smoking after being exposed to the campaign and why.

**Cultural/Critical**

Cultural approach, as the name suggests, indicates signs, values, attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, language, even clothing, accessories, food etc. in a given society. Cultural approach in communication research looks at communication from the point of view of socio-cultural processes. Borrowed from anthropology, this approach to research examines communication as socio-cultural process and explores ritualistic processes due to communication. This approach acknowledges heterogeneity, diversity and the dynamic nature of communication process.

Cultural studies, unlike cultural theory, come from critical approach. Cultural studies relate to the study of ideology, culture, social structure and power and borrow from Marxism, feminism, race, culture, film theory, post colonialism, political economy, history, philosophy and so on.

**Check Your Progress: 1**

**Note:** 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1) What areas are included in communication research?

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2) List the types of communication research based on the nature and stage of programme.

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3) What is the difference between formative and pre-production research?

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- 4) What is the difference in structural-functional-behavioural and cultural approach to communication research?

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## **2.3 STUDY OF ELEMENTS IN COMMUNICATION**

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Communication research also includes researching various elements of communication including communicators, media text, distribution process and audiences. The communicators include the owners, creators, content producers, actors or technicians and so on while media text includes - film, television programmes, newspaper articles, radio programme or any media content. Distribution covers how and what reaches consumers/audiences/receivers of communication. The most important and challenging dimension of media communication is the audience. Consumption of communication in terms of its receivers /audiences- how communication is being received, effects of communication, consequences and context of consumption also need to be researched. Let us discuss each of these elements in detail.

### **2.3.1 Communications**

Communication in a mass media environment is designed and executed by communicators. You watch television shows, play games on mobile, listen to radio programmes, watch films either on television or in theatres; all of these are created by communicators who work in teams, led by a team director. But as a researcher, it is interesting to find out how these productions get made. Communicator studies can be labelled as those in which institutions as media communicators cannot be individuals but are organisations/agencies/institutions or even media conglomerates.

Within communication research traditions, communicators can be researched using varied methods. For example, you can do in-depth interviews of the psychological or sociological characteristics of filmmakers to understand their perspectives. One can also study the management practices in television channels and the ownership patterns of media by either politicians or by large industrial houses to understand how their views influence the content of the media. You can also examine the language spoken by film directors on the film sets or study how actresses are treated on television sets and so on.

Communicator researches help us understand who creates the communication and under what conditions. There can be studies of policy, media economics, or political economy approaches to examine media institutions. There can also be managerial, organisational, financial studies in order to understand the working of media institutions.

### **2.3.2 Media Content**

Media content is another important aspect of research - it can be television or radio programmes, newspaper articles, internet content, or films which make up

media text. A study of media content provides us information about the society from where the text has originated or society for which the text is intended, and being consumed. For example, Indian films are popular across the world. However, their popularity is not defined by who created the films but the way the codes, values and narratives are presented transcending the geo-political boundaries.

As a researcher you can use methods like content analysis or semiotic analysis to examine media content. Text analysis, literary analysis, semiotic analysis, message system analysis are some of the examples of communication material research. Study of text also helps you understand what is being communicated and who is being portrayed and how. For example, you can study how much space given in a newspaper to issues relating to senior citizens. By analysing the space, you can arrive at the importance of senior citizens' issues. You can also study how much time is given to politics in a news bulletin and compare that with the time given to health related issues, to determine the priority a television channel places on those subjects. What will you conclude, if over fifteen days, the major news bulletin of a news channel gives 60 per cent of its time to political news, 15 per cent to sports; 15 per cent to entertainment; and only 10 per cent to other newsworthy items?

### **2.3.3 Distribution**

As you are aware, mass media reach audiences through various distribution channels. Understanding how communication is reaching the audience or how communication is being sent will help you to understand the ecology of communication. For example, newspaper distribution in India is still a complex process. However, the newspaper readership and consumption is linked to distribution patterns. Analysis of the distribution patterns and the impact of online availability of newspapers will help you understand the status of newspaper business in a given society.

### **2.3.4 Audiences**

Receivers or audiences are the most important in the process of communication. As opposed to earlier conceptions of audience as individuals, literature now recognises them as plural and 'audiences'. Mass media audiences can be radio listeners, television viewers, newspaper readers, filmgoers, mobile phone users and so on. Since mass media audiences are heterogeneous and scattered it is important to research them. Researching audiences helps you understand if the communication reached them, how they received it, what the effects of communication were, and if any changes happened because of the communication in the lives of the audience.

You have studied basic communication process of sender-message-receiver-feedback in earlier units. Communication research has to examine how communication messages are received. If there is no receiver for the message, the process of communication research is not complete. The other examples of research related to receivers are audience research and reception analysis. The earlier traditions of research have effects tradition which viewed media as all powerful impacting each member of the media audiences. Today, post-effects traditions, uses and gratification, cultivation research, reception analysis view audiences as more active and creators of meanings.

**Activity-1**

Design a research study using two key words; “Women” and “Media”. Select the type of study you wish to design and the approach adopted, drawing upon the content of this unit.

**Check Your Progress: 2**

**Note:** 1) Use the space below for your answers.

2) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this Unit.

1) Which elements of communication can be researched?

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2) Is it possible to design a research study that can examine all the elements of communication process? If so which approach will be useful for such study?

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3) Briefly mention the shift in the way audiences are perceived in communication research over the years.

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**2.4 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you were exposed to various classifications of communication research. It was discussed that communication research can be examined using the lenses of design, stage, nature, location, and approaches to research communication. Communication research is also undertaken on the elements of communication; sender-message-receivers as well as feedback or effects of communication.

By now you would have understood that research problems can be studied using varied approaches and can be designed depending upon your research goals and questions that you wish to explore through your study.

In the next unit, we shall discuss defining and formulating a research problem. Keeping the classification of research in the background will help you to define your own research problem.

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## 2.5 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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## 2.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Communication research covers a wide spectrum of areas including media message creation, design of those messages, distribution of those messages, and consumption of media messages.
- 2) Based on the: Nature of programme: policy, pre-production, production, telecast, post telecast.
- 3) Stage of research: formative; process and summative research.
- 4) Formative research is about goals of programme, audiences, programme content and decisions about transmission /distribution whereas pre-production research is a micro exercise and is mainly decision making with reference to the particular production in terms of story, locations, script breakdowns, sets, clothing, properties and so on.
- 5) Structural approach to communication research focuses on structure of content whereas functional approach examines what is the function of that communication for audiences. Behavioural approach examines change in practices amongst members of audiences and cultural (which is also known as critical approach to communication research) views process of communication as an activity/process that impacts power and questions relationship between communicator and audiences.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) All the elements of communication- sender, message, channel, receiver, feedback can be researched. Approaches to research these elements may vary but it is possible to research each and every element of communication process.

**Communication Research**

- 2) It is possible to design a research study that can examine all the elements of communication process using cultural studies or critical approach.
- 3) Earlier approaches viewed audience as a homogenous entity which was uniformly influenced by the media message. This led to media effects tradition. Later researchers recognised that audiences are diverse and heterogeneous entities who receive media messages and interpret them according to their own context. This also led to plural of audience as 'audiences'. Uses and gratification, Reception analysis and Cultural studies have suggested that audiences are active beings who receive media messages in their local context and do not get uniformly impacted.



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