1. Introduction

This unit looks at the relationship between media research and social science, focusing in particular on the early days of media research in the U.K. and in the U.S.A. It recounts (from the position of one who was closely associated with it) the experience of the Television Research Committee in the U.K. in helping to establish a new research agenda and in generating sociological research into the media. It distinguishes between conventional research (drawing on the methods of natural science, but often making no reference to social theory), administrative research (mainly serving the communications industry) and critical research (often inspired by social concerns, but independent of industrial interests in the questions which it asks, and relating the media to broader social, economic and political questions and concerns).

1.1 The nature of social science

One of the aims of this unit is to look at the part played by social science in the study of the media and the communication process. We might start by asking "What is Social Science?" Many definitions are available, but here we need not trouble to debate the relative merits of these. Let us settle for a fairly simple one that encompasses the chief characteristics of social science - characteristics which will receive more detailed attention as we examine research into communications and the media.

1.2 What is scientific about social science?

"Social science, which is generally regarded as including psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and political science, consists of the disciplined and systematic study of society and its institutions, and of how and why people behave as they do, both as individuals and in groups within society. At a minimum it would appear that to be "scientific" entails a systematic and disciplined method of acquiring knowledge, and that knowledge must be verifiable knowledge.

So, we enter a problem area at the outset for it may be argued (Gareau, 1987) that society, its institutions and social relationships are not susceptible to scientific study, and that the methods of the natural sciences should not be applied to social phenomena. That the terms "social" and "scientific" may not sit comfortably together was illustrated by the decision of the British

Government in the early nineteen eighties to change the name of the Social Science Research Council (which included mass communication research in its remit) to the Economic and Social Research Council. The message seemed to be: if it's social it can't be scientific!" (J.D. Halloran, Social Science, communication research and the Third World, *Media Development* (1998) Vol. 2, WACC).

The humanistic affinity of social science needs to be recognized, as do its overlaps with philosophy, law, geography and literary criticism, but even amongst those who consider themselves to be social scientists, we are likely to find many different approaches to the study of the media and communications. As we shall see later, these may range from those who strive to be scientific, adopting or adapting models from the natural sciences, to those who, in studying the same subjects, rely more on imagination and insight unfettered, as they see it, by scientific paraphernalia. Just to complicate matters, there are also those who attempt to blend the two approaches.

Who and what should we include, then, in our overview of the social scientific contribution to mass communication research? My approach is inclusive rather than exclusive, although selections and preferences will become obvious in the course of the following discussion. The unit does not set out to provide a comprehensive and balanced history of mass communication research (this is the task of Module 1 as a whole). My main purpose is to draw attention to and describe how social scientists have studied the media and the communication process, and to examine the various factors - economic, political, cultural and disciplinary - which have facilitated or impeded the development and maintenance of these different approaches.

Although our focus is on social science, social scientists are not the only scholars with a contribution to make to a debate which certainly pre-dates the advent of social science. The debate about the media and their influence and role in society has been carried on by literary critics, social philosophers, moralists, artists and educators who, judging from their comments, often feel that the social scientists are so preoccupied with research techniques and methodological devices that their works lack immediate social relevance, tending to concentrate only on the questions for which they have the `scientific' means at their disposal to answer rather than the questions which are the most interesting and important. The social scientists in turn query the usefulness of evidence produced without the benefit of scientific approaches and criticize what they consider to be the undisciplined nature of the generalizations, interpretations and speculations which abound in this field (McQuail, 2005, chapter 3).

1.2.1 Cultural studies

Some years ago I drew attention to the nature and extent of this conflict as it existed in the 1960s (Halloran, 1964). In recent years, with the burgeoning of cultural studies, the issue has taken on an added significance. It has re-emerged in new forms, and is relevant to our discussions in this unit.

The term `cultural studies' covers a multitude of positions. As James Carey, an outstanding scholar in this field, has written, "[cultural studies] does not represent a homogeneous point of view; it is not a body of propositions or methods commanding universal assent from those who practice scholarship under its banner" (Carey, 1992). (As part of Activity 5 of this unit you will be asked to read Chapter 5 of the Course Book by McQuail, 2005, which is an introduction to cultural studies).

Carey's wing of cultural studies shares with many social scientists a faith in liberal democracy and in reformist measures to make society more just and open (Gouldner, 1955). It represents a revolt against the extreme scientific approach referred to above, and is interested "in charting and explaining social conflict, in uncovering the meanings embedded in social practice (and) in laying out the dimensions and politics of social struggle" (Carey, 1992). Carey is quick to remind us, however, that there are those working in cultural studies who are far removed from his approach. These tend to equate pretentious speculation and interpretation with theory, adopt a selective approach to the use of evidence, and appear to have abandoned, or perhaps have never even embraced or understood, a systematic approach to knowledge. But far more serious than this, according to Carey, is the failure of such writers to understand history, economics, organizations, power and, above all, social relationships and the nature of social reality in contemporary society. In other words, their work reflects an ignorance of the social scientific perspective and an absence of intellectual analysis and political understanding (Carey, 1992).

So, even in our relatively inclusive approach not everything goes. In fact, in searching for guidelines for our inclusions we could do worse than follow the advice of the sociologist, John Rex. Some thirty years ago he emphasised the need for systematic and accurate observation, a respect for evidence, careful examination and description, caution and the consideration of alternatives. Rex saw these qualities as the sine qua non of social scientific endeavour, and he rejected dogma, doctrinaire assertions, selectivity and the work of those who were either unable or unwilling to make the distinction between ideology and social science, and who often promoted the former in the shape of the latter (Rex, 1978).

Because I want to prioritize disciplined, systematic study over speculation and assertion I do not want to imply indifference to values and social concerns, nor to discourage people from advocating and working towards preferred futures, or having their our own specific aims and objectives. However, it is essential to recognise that others may have different preferences and objectives. To some it is the commitment, the social concern and the wish to use results to produce change that gives research not only its dynamic quality, but also its justification. As Alvin Gouldner maintained, the critical, moral component is a vital part of an endeavour which is essentially purposive, and in which social scientists might be likened to "clinicians striving to further democratic potentialities (Gouldner, 1955. Ideally, the pursuit of theoretical refinement *need not* be incompatible with either methodological rigour or social objectives.

1.3 The limitations of social science

We might usefully conclude this section by drawing attention to the limitations of social science. It is important to do this because some social scientists have created false expectations by suggesting that clear answers and successful formulae may be produced at short notice. In doing this they over-simplify by omitting that which does not fit into their neat schema, and this tends to lead to a failure to recognize what really amounts to the intrinsic unpredictability of our field.

When he was Chairman of the Social Science Research Council in Britain, Andrew Schonfield wrote:

> "In the social sciences it is rarely possible to pose questions and provide answers in the manner of some of the natural sciences, and it is a refusal to recognize this that has often led us up the wrong path. It is the nature of most of our work that it tends to produce useful ideas and an increasingly firm factual base, rather than clear-cut answers

to major policy questions. We must try to tease out the relationships which have a crucial effect on policy and, in doing so, provide not so much widely applicable generalizations as a sound, informed basis for decision-making and, at the same time, cut down the area of reliance on guesswork and prejudice." (Schonfield, 1971).

This is the framework within which we have to operate.

Activity One (Allow 30 minutes)

What do you consider to be the essential features of a social scientific approach to mass communication research?

How do you react to the statement "If it's social it can't be scientific"?

What approach, if any, would you exclude from a systematic study of the media, and why?

2. The Context of Mass Communication Research

"We need the knowledge that only research can provide before we can develop adequate communication policies". (UNESCO, 1971)

"If they can get you to ask the wrong questions they don't have to worry about the answers you provide". (Halloran, 1991)

"Information is a necessary but never a sufficient cause of social action, although there are some instances where it may be used as a substitute for action". (Halloran, 1981)

2.1 Influence, internal and external

Although the myths of objectivity die hard in certain media circles, in journalism in particular, over the last quarter of a century there has developed a wider acceptance that what appears on our screens and in print (including "hard" news) is influenced by a range of factors economic, organizational, political, cultural, technological and professional. In other words, media material is not produced in a cultural/political vacuum. There has also been a gradual realization in social science that the questions asked, the methods employed, the interpretation of results - in fact the overall approaches of those who study the media and the communication process - are similarly subject to a wide range of influences.

In tracing some of the developments in the short history of mass communication research, and in examining some of the main approaches, one of our aims will be to identify these influences - internal and external to social science - and see how they have helped to set the research agenda by facilitating or impeding specific lines of enquiry.

The UNESCO quotation which opens this section dates from the early 1970s, and was based on the recognition that while wide-ranging developments in communication, at national and international levels, were taking place, little thought had been given to, and little was known about, the wider economic, cultural and political implications of these developments. It formed part of a plea for more research and for the development of communication policies and related research policies which might remedy this state of affairs.

Despite these developments in communication, however, we are still short on information - the sort of information on the wider social and cultural implications of developments in communication that ideally should provide a reliable base for policy formulation and decision-making. This becomes particularly evident when we are called upon to address the communication process within the wider international setting. We need to ask why this is so.

Because of the way research has been defined, initiated, supported and organized, and because of the tasks it has been called on to perform, not only do we not have enough information but the information we have is partial and unbalanced. We know far more about some parts of the world than about others; we know far more about some aspects of the communication process than about others; and we have more analyses and interpretations from certain value positions than from others. An additional complication is that the implications of these imbalances are not properly understood and, as a result, we frequently encounter universal generalizations and cross-cultural applications which are just not valid.

I want to emphasize the point, therefore, that research is not initiated, organized, executed or applied in a social/political vacuum. Appreciation of the nature of research and its application calls for an understanding of the historical, economic, political, organizational, disciplinary, professional and personal factors which impinge on the research process in so many ways.

Put briefly, these are the general factors that govern what research is carried out and, perhaps more importantly, what research is not carried out. In some way or other the questions we ask in research are indications of what we consider to be important or problematic. They reflect our interests, our priorities, our values and our concerns. They also reflect our compromises with regard to what is allowed or is otherwise possible.

Unfortunately, it would appear that there are still researchers, wherever the media and the communication process are studied, who do not recognize this situation. They accept as given, or take for granted as an unquestioned assumption, what ideally they should regard as problematic, and this, not surprisingly, is reflected in their work, what they do, how they interpret their research findings, and how they seek to apply the knowledge their research generates.

Research is essentially a conditioned or circumscribed attempt to construct a representation of reality and, in a way, a method of social control. The outcome is a version of reality - maybe the most accurate version available, but still a version. The version is constructed by the selection of areas or topics, and by the use of concepts, techniques, categories, systems of classification and categorization, and the positing of relationships within these areas. Again, these concepts, categories and relationships do not develop in a vacuum - they are not neutral - therefore, in this unit we need to ask about the framework within which they have developed and are being applied. This is particularly important when comparisons are being made between different approaches.

The unbalanced or uneven distribution of research internationally is a reflection of other areas of economic and informational imbalance which characterize the international scene. Research does not exist independently of these. Even today, despite changes and critical developments in recent years, *at least as far as quantity is concerned*, the imbalance still exists. Research approaches and thinking that stem from western industrialized experiences are still very much in evidence, and this applies to research which deals with international communications, media and development, and Third World problems generally.

Activity Two (Allow 20 minutes)

Read chapter 4 by Halloran in Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995, Approaches to Media. Summarize the factors that may impinge on the research process. Does the fact that research is not carried out in a social and political vacuum invalidate it?

3. Factors that Influenced the Development of Media Research in the U.K.

We have seen that research into the communication process and the mass media can be influenced by many factors. These might range from the needs of the market place, through social concern (e.g. about media violence), to the character and stage of development of the disciplines (e.g. sociology, psychology) involved in research. This section provides a specific example of the factors that influenced the development and direction of mass communication research in one country, i.e. Great Britain.

The way in which research is influenced will differ from country to country, different combinations of factors applying in different places. Additionally, the situation is far better documented in some places than in others, so again our knowledge is not evenly distributed. Nevertheless, the same general principle applies in all cases, namely that research is not free from constraints, and its development and operations must be studied within the wider historical and social contexts.

3.1 Lack of research

Mass communication research does not have a long history. If we focus on disciplined, systematic, social scientific approaches to the study of the media as social institutions and communication as a social process, then in Great Britain the research story does not really start until the early 1960s.

The first review of the field undertaken in Great Britain, and published in 1963 (Halloran, 1963) was able to refer to very few research exercises, and these concentrated on media effects (i.e. the impact of media on attitudes and behaviour of individuals) within the experimental framework of social psychology, and/or were associated with the market and media institutions. The few general text-books published by British sociologists ignored the subject, and references to "media", or "communication" were not even to be found in the indexes of these books. University teachers such as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams were writing and asking pertinent questions about the mass media, but the subject was not formally taught in universities. It would appear that the first U.K. course on the sociology of the mass media was provided by the Extra-Mural Department of the University of Leicester in 1962.

The Committee on Broadcasting (The Pilkington Committee), when it reported in 1962 (H.M.S.O., 1962) confined its remarks on research to two paragraphs, and these were not particularly informative or relevant to our remit in this unit nor, for that matter, to the future of broadcasting - the Committee's remit.

3.2 Social concern

In November 1961 the Home Secretary (a senior government minister), responding to expressions of concern about the alleged harmful influence of television, held a conference of representatives of religious, educational, social service and other interests to discuss juvenile delinquency and, in particular, the extent to which the incidence of delinquency derived from the general state of society. Arising from this conference the Independent Television Authority (ITA), the non-governmental body with responsibility for the regulation of commercial television services in the UK at that time, offered to finance research into the impact of television on society, with particular reference to its effect on young people - in the hope, although not directly expressed, that it would be established that there were no adverse effects stemming from television,

Following discussions with the ITA and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the publicly funded counterpart to the ITA, the government arranged, as a first step, for a group of experts in the fields of psychology, sociology, social studies and statistics to hold a conference. This conference recommended, among other things, that research should be carried out, but that it should not be primarily concerned with the direct study of the effect of television on delinquency. It was felt that the scope should be wider and should deal with the part that television plays, or could play, in relation to other influences in communicating knowledge and fostering attitudes. The conference also recommended that a committee should be set up to give further consideration to the whole problem, to initiate and co-ordinate research, and to administer the funds that were made available.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Leicester accepted the Home Secretary's invitation to become Chairman of the committee, and in July 1963 the committee had its first meeting, and began its work with the following terms of reference:

"To initiate and co-ordinate research into the part which television plays, or could play, in relation to other influences, as a medium of communication and in fostering attitudes, with particular reference to the ways in which young people's moral concepts and attitudes develop, and on the processes of perception through which they are influenced by television and other media of communication; and to administer any funds made available to it for such research".

Although the committee was appointed by the Home Secretary and, strangely enough, was responsible to the Prison Department (thus denoting the association of television with crime and delinquency), the government was unable to provide for its servicing because it was clear that a secretary would be required who was familiar with the media and with research in mass communications. Neither the ITA nor the BBC could meet this need or the need for independence, so the chairman invited a member of the staff of his own university, a sociologist who was familiar with and had published work in the field of mass communications (the aforementioned review) to become secretary of the committee.

It was originally envisaged that, after an initial period of discussion and negotiation with researchers, the committee would make contracts for research and then spend a relatively quiet time awaiting the outcome of the commissioned research before making any public statement. Although under no specific obligation to produce a formal report, or make recommendations - its main task was to co-ordinate and initiate research - the committee was expected to arrange for the publication of research reports and, where appropriate, to comment on the findings.

However, when the committee had surveyed the research interests and the plans of social scientists in Great Britain it found that very few of them were working on research topics which related to the terms of reference, even when these were most widely interpreted. A number of

proposals were received but, with one exception, these were judged to be unlikely to contribute substantially to an understanding of the problem area.

The publication (Halloran, 1963), which had led to the appointment of the secretary of the committee consisted of "a study of the mass media and their challenge", particular attention being given to the validity of the claims about media influence - positive and negative - in the light of systematic research. The book, based on articles written in 1962 was published in 1963, and as already indicated contained few references to British *research*. Neither the base from which to construct a research strategy nor the researchers capable of executing a strategy were available in Great Britain.

The committee decided that it would have to proceed slowly, clarifying by its own interpretation of work in other countries, particularly in the USA, both the significance of the terms of reference and its own ultimate objectives. It would have to identify the problem areas amenable to social scientific research, assessing the social relevance of the specific questions that could be formulated within these areas, seeing what methods, skills and resources were available and could be used in attempts to answer these questions, and then finally establishing its research priorities.

Fortunately, perhaps, for the future of mass communication research the committee recognised that it had been presented with an unusual opportunity to promote scientific research in a relatively new, fascinating and important area in which fact and objectivity were urgently required to inform an increasingly spirited and continuous public debate. In the circumstances the committee soon saw that it would be a mistake to dissipate this opportunity by premature decisions to commission the first proposals put forward. To confine its activity to the acceptance and rejection of research proposals was not desirable when the substantial expertise and experience of the members could be directed to the creation of a sound base- line for future research at a much more comprehensive level.

The importance of this committee, its policy and strategy, in the development of mass communication research in Great Britain and beyond cannot be over-estimated (Television Research Committee 1966). Its decisions led to the establishment at the University of Leicester in 1966 of the first independent institutional base for mass communication research in the country and, for quite a number of years after that, Leicester led the field in research innovations and publications. It is worth noting that the terms of reference given to the Leicester Centre by the Television Research Committee were considerably wider than those given to the committee by the Home Office. The committee made a conscious decision to go beyond what some saw as its crime and delinquency remit, which it regarded as far too narrow and restrictive. Needless to say, this was not welcomed by some of those who had expressed the concern in the first place, and were looking to research to show that their fears were justified.

The policy adopted by the committee enabled the Centre to develop a comprehensive, sociologically oriented research policy at national and international levels, in which the media as social institutions, and communication as a social process were studied within the wider social context.

3.2.1 Combinations of influence factors

So, with regard to the factors influencing research - which is really an aspect of the sociology of knowledge, the study of how knowledge is acquired, developed and disseminated, in social

context - the important point to note is that the first major development in mass communication research in Britain, which later was to have far-reaching international implications, had its origins in a range of circumstances, including a relative dearth of existing research, increased social concern, the response to that concern by both the government and the media (including the provision of funds), the composition of the committee set up by the government, the servicing of that committee and the policy it adopted and the state of the art of communication research and its contributory disciplines at the time.

Two further points need to be emphasised. First, that although this is a single specific example of research development - unique at one level; a case study in fact - the general principles are universally applicable.

Second, that in this particular case the implications of this development stemming from the policy adopted and the aforementioned circumstances go beyond research policies, programmes, projects and publications. The Leicester Centre was the headquarters of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (now known as the International Association for Media and Communication Research, with some 2300 members in over seventy different countries) for eighteen years, during which time Centre staff became involved in numerous international research exercises and acted as consultants to academic, media and political bodies. Students from all over the world studied, and still do study, at the Centre, and ex-students and staff hold prominent positions in academia and the media in many countries.

In a social scientific exercise we need to recognise how all this came to pass. We also need to recognise that attempts to deal with the history of mass communication research at times may seem more intent on slotting events into neat post-hoc constructed categories, representing some value position, than in dealing with what actually happened. What actually happened is rarely as neat and tidy and as amenable to categorisation, particularly to dichotomisation, as some who write about it seem to think.

4. Looking to the USA

As already indicated, the Television Research Committee did not find it possible to construct a research strategy and programme from the base that was available in Great Britain. Not surprisingly, therefore, it turned to the United States, where research into the media and communications had a longer history, in order to see what research had been done and what might be learned from it with regard to the committee's remit.

The research situation in the USA at the time, as interpreted by the Secretary of the Committee, was presented as a major part of a working paper which went a long way to determining the research policy and strategy of the Committee (Halloran, 1964).

Inevitably the bulk of the research reviewed fell within the mainstream of mass communication research in the USA which has been referred to as "conventional research". At the risk of oversimplification, in broad, general terms, this research would claim to be value free, with positivistic, empiricist, behaviouristic, psychological emphases.

Activity Three (Allow 20 minutes)

Turn now to the Appendix for a further brief discussion about `conventional research'. How far do you think the above criticisms are justified?

Some examples and discussions about U.S. research during this period can be found in Sections 1, 2 and 3 of Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995, Approaches to Media, including Chapter 2 by Hardt, Chapter 3 by Gitlin, Chapter 10 by Wilensky, Chapter 16 by Katz and Lazarsfeld, among others.

Although this type of research was reviewed rather critically in the research committee's report, care was taken not to throw the baby out with the bath water, for there was much useful work that fell under the above-mentioned headings. It was also made clear that critical comments on this type of work should not be seen as a rejection of rigorous methods, experimental work, or quantification. It was essentially a matter of emphasis and balance. There was, however, a severe criticism of the primacy of this position of "scientism", where "scientific" was defined solely or mainly in terms of method, and where little or no attention was given to theory, concepts or the nature of the relevant substantive issues and their relationship to wider societal concerns.

4.1 The limitations of conventional research

In short, in the USA mass communication research had developed, like other branches of social science, essentially as a response to the requirements of modern, industrial, urban society for empirical, quantitative, policy-related information about its operations. Most of the research that was carried out was geared to improving the effectiveness and profitability of the media, often regarded simply as objects of study, or as neutral tools in achieving stated aims and objectives, usually of a commercial nature. This was at the heart of `administrative' or service research, where the emphasis was on improving methods to facilitate the achievement of specific goals rather than on refining concepts, developing theories, challenging systems or achieving social change.

In this way the prevailing research mode, although often referred to as abstracted empiricism, was certainly not abstracted from the society within which it operated, and which it was geared to serve. With this in mind the report to the Television Research Committee argued that it was necessary to ask about the questions which had not been asked as well as those questions which had been asked. For, in what was a media rather than a society centred approach in mainstream, conventional communication research, theory had been neglected, conceptualisation was crude, content analyses superficial, and the media were not seen in relation to other institutions. There were few, if any, questions about power, organisation and control; there was little reference to structural considerations, and rarely were attempts made to study the social meaning of the media in historical or sociological contexts. Overall, the bulk of the research was unbalanced, tending to concentrate on one aspect of the process (effects and reactions), to the neglect of the factors that influenced what was produced.

This dominant research approach was marked by an emphasis on answers seen to be useful in the short term, a concentration on methods (particularly on what could be measured, with its false notion of precision), and a focus on the individual with the related confinement of the notion of media influence to imitation and attitude and opinion change. The possible influence of the media on institutions, in defining social reality, in setting the social-political agenda, in legitimating certain forms of behaviour and institutional arrangements, and on cultural change tended to be ignored. This, so it was argued in the report, produced a completely inadequate understanding of the communication process, the notion of media influence and the role of the

media in society. Sometimes research results were little more than artefacts of the research design and the false conceptualisations employed (Halloran 1964 and 1970).

Reliability (the replication and confirmation of results) was regarded as much more important than validity (whether results actually dealt with the phenomenon they claimed to be dealing with) and, in some cases, the availability of accepted methods even determined the nature of the problem to be researched. This led to a plethora of allegedly definitive statistically supported statements about the trivial, inconsequential, and at times plainly invalid. (See chapters 15, 17 and 18 in McQuail 2005, and Halloran 1981.)

It would, of course, be quite unfair and indeed inaccurate to suggest that up to the early 1960s there was no communication research in the USA that fell outside the conventional parameters outlined above. Hanno Hardt (Hardt 1992) provides a corrective historical perspective when, starting by reminding us that the issues of communication and society figured prominently in the work of the Chicago pragmatic sociologists well before the second world war, he goes on to review the work of such as Park, Blumler, Wirth, Sapir, Lasswell, Westley, MacLean, Lazarsfeld, The Frankfurt School, Gerbner, Janowitz, Rosenberg, Manning-White and others who addressed wider issues in those early days and who, although not sharing a common approach, could not immediately or readily be placed within the aforementioned conventional parameters.

On the other hand, Hardt also reminds us that these interests in the wider social and cultural aspects of media and communications remained in the margins. They were never taken on board by mainstream communication researchers, where the approach of Wilbur Schramm (Schramm, 1954) with its close links to journalism education predominated.

Schramm's interest was journalistic rather than scientific, although he had an interest in methodological issues as they related to practical questions. However, there was no apparent interest in producing a theoretical framework for the critical assessment of the media in American society.

Moreover, a review of the sociological textbooks in use at the time in the USA indicated that the study of the media and mass communication did not figure prominently in the sociological syllabuses of the day. There were some exceptions but, on the whole, this field of study had not attracted the work of social theorists. It had been hived off to Schools of Journalism and Schools of Communication.

Commenting on the emergence of a new interdisciplinary field, which was becoming known as "communication research", Dallas Smythe saw the new researchers as consciously adopting the stance of "scientism". Consequently "the evidence from the fields of history, sociology, political science and economics was ignored as being unfit for acceptance as science" (Smythe, 1954).

Even some of those, like Lazarsfeld, who grappled with the problems posed by the conflict between critical and theoretical interests on the one hand, and empirical demands on the other, never really escaped from an attachment to the commercial interests of the culture industry, and the political concerns of government. In a sense "critical" was seen within the limits of the status quo, and consequently the type of critical challenge referred to in the following sections, and the associated theoretical concerns, never really surfaced in sustained research programmes (Hardt 1992, Gitlin 1978, Katz 1987).

4.2 Summary

Concluding his excellent coverage of research approaches in the period which ended just before the Television Research Committee in Great Britain was given its terms of reference, Hardt (1992) maintained that in the USA "mainstream communication and media research had failed to address critical developments from within and without its boundaries. It had remained within specified categories of interests reflected in an academic specialisation in the study of communication that was interdisciplinary by its commitment to a behavioural science orientation, but without any significant or successful attempt to break out of its monadic circle".

What could be learned from this? In the mid nineteen sixties, the Television Research Committee in Great Britain was introduced to a vast body of work from the USA, most of it serving special political, commercial and media interests rather than questioning or challenging. Thousands of projects had been carried out in a fragmentary, ad hoc, piecemeal fashion, but there was little evidence of the systematic accumulation and development of a corpus of knowledge, and few attempts to relate the work to an appropriate social theory or critique of society.

Activity Four (Allow 45 minutes)

If you have not done so already, you should now read Chapter 2 by Hanno Hardt and Chapter 3 by Todd Gitlin in Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995, Approaches to Media. From your reading (or from your previous notes) establish why communication research in the USA took the directions it did in the post-war years. Why do you think most of the research was social psychological rather than sociological? And what use could the Television Research Committee in Great Britain - given its remit - make of this research?

5. Developing a Critical Research Strategy

This section will examine how, starting from the base of what was and what was not available, a research strategy was formulated with a sociological and critical orientation.

5.1 What to do and not to do

As far as the Television Research Committee was concerned it could be said that the main outcome of this review of the state of the art in mass communication research in the early 1960s was that at least it was known what not to do - a great step forward - but that there was still the task of deciding precisely what to do in terms of formulating research policies and strategies, and deciding on the appropriate supportive structures.

Identifying criteria for future research policy and strategy the Television Research Committee, in its final report in 1969, offered the following advice (Television Research Committee 1969):

(a) It is important to study the media and mass communication not as isolated phenomena, but as integral parts of a wider social system.

(b) There is a need for theoretical as well as methodological developments in the study of mass communication, and for integration and co-ordination of research efforts.

(c) It is necessary to develop interdisciplinary work with a view to producing comprehensive research strategies with sufficient power to capture all the relevant processes in a given problem area.

(d) Little research has as yet been carried out into the role of the mass media in the early stages of the child's development. Attempts should be made to remedy this, and long- term developmental studies should also be undertaken.

(e) It is desirable to carry out further research into the positive as well as into the negative aspects of the media - to ask questions about the potential of the media, for example about how they could be used in broadening or developing taste, increasing social participation, improving international understanding, or reducing prejudice.

(f) Research should include studies of the production process. Research has shown that it is important to know how media producers (the term is used in the widest sense) see their role, and to have information about their values, attitudes, aims, conventions, intentions, working conditions and general background. Patterns of recruitment should also be examined.

(g) The products of the mass media, and therefore the effects, depend (at least in part) on the prevailing system of ownership, control and support. Research (on a wider, interdisciplinary plane covering economic, legal and political aspects) should investigate the relationships between programming and control. The planning of programme schedules and the allocation of time and money to different types of programme are but two aspects of this problem area which research has shown require further and closer examination.

(h) In studying the influence of the media on social attitudes and values, researchers should not be deterred by the difficulties and complexities of the problem from carrying out investigations along a wider front than one normally finds in mass communication research. Questions should be asked about the influence of different forms of presentation of news, current affairs and political issues. Media content should be examined for values; omissions as well as commissions should be studied; the question of trivialisation, and the possibility that the media are working against rather than in support of an active `participatory' democracy, should not fall outside the scope of a comprehensive research policy.

5.2 A sociological and critical orientation

In terms of research and the factors that facilitate its development, the most important thing to note about these recommendations was that, as far as can be ascertained, they represented the first ever formal statement of research policies which sought to challenge rather than to serve the media establishment, and which aimed to replace the hitherto prevailing narrow, psychological approaches with a broader, critical, sociological orientation.

But by this time - the late 1960s - in Great Britain the pioneering Television Research Committee was no longer alone in its opposition to conventional research, and in its search for new ways of exploration. It had been joined by other forces and traditions - including for example, Raymond Williams, and the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) with Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall - in what became known as "critical research", although this term was never precisely defined, and sometimes misleadingly opposed to what was termed pluralism (see McQuail 2005, Chapters 4 and 5 for further details on these and

related developments). However, the institutional infrastructure was still barely visible in this research, and systematic research was still pretty thin on the ground.

Just as it is misleading to generalise about conventional mass communication research, it is even more misleading to do so about the critical approach which, although owing much more to European thought and scholarship than the conventional approach, nevertheless reflected the influence of American sociology, including the work referred to in the last section. For example, the writings of the Rileys which, although not leading directly to any specific research projects in the USA, facilitated the introduction into research strategies of concepts such as social structure, process, social systems, reference groups, conditions of production and structural dependency. This played no small part in the formulation of the above recommendations (Riley and Riley, 1959)

It could be argued that the main unity of the critical approach - if in fact a unity could be identified at that time - was in its opposition to conventional work rather than in any shared approach. For the critical umbrella covered a variety of positions and, as we have seen, it could be that some of the more extreme ideological positions should not really be classified as social scientific research.

Let us now look a little more closely at the critical, problem and policy-oriented research, primarily with a sociological perspective. It should be noted here that a distinction is made between policy-oriented research and policy or administrative research. The latter, as we have seen (Hardt, 1992), generally seeks to bring about the efficient execution of policy, with a view to making the existing system more efficient. On the whole, it is not concerned to ask questions about the validity of the system, or to challenge predominant values or suggest alternatives. Policy-oriented research, on the other hand, ideally addresses itself to the major issues of our time, and is concerned, amongst other things, with questioning the values and claims of the system, applying independent criteria, suggesting alternatives with regard to both means and ends, and exploring the possibility of new forms and structures (Halloran, 1981). Specific examples of these differences will be provided in the sections which follow.

It is not necessary to make an either/or issue out of these different approaches. We are not talking about incompatibilities, but about the different implications for policy and society of approaches which prevailed in the past (and which, up to a point, are still with us) and those which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s (Blumler 1981, Gitlin 1978). Put crudely, and to repeat, the conventional approaches of the past which characterised so much communication research, explicitly or implicitly, served and supported rather than criticised or challenged.

I appreciate that to talk in terms of a critical, problem and policy-oriented, sociological approach may beg more questions than it answers. There are different sociological approaches, and it might be said, for example, that sociological functionalism may have more in common with psychological functionalism than it has with other, more critical sociological approaches (Riley and Riley 1959, Hardt 1992, Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995).

5.3 The distinctiveness of the sociological approach

While there may be some truth in this, I would maintain, subject to some qualifications that follow later, that there is something meaningful and distinctive about the critical sociological perspective referred to above, and most definitely something that marked it off from the

approaches that prevailed in the past. The sociological perspective and the concepts that come with it at least *make it possible* to adopt a more holistic, challenging attitude to the status quo.

This developing, critical thrust was seen not only as offering the greatest contrast and challenge to the older approaches, but also as providing a major contribution to the most important international debate on vital communication issues which developed in the 1970s. Its advocates and practitioners played no small part in the development of mass communication research in Europe (particularly in Britain), and it was also influential internationally, particularly through UNESCO policies, research and publications where, at least for a time, it supplanted the earlier, conventional approach associated with Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues (Halloran 1981, UNESCO 1971).

"Additionally critical research, although stemming from a wide range of positions and reflecting different values, is less likely than conventional research to be encumbered by historical and institutional relationships with journalism and broadcasting. Moreover, it is not as closely linked with markets, audiences and publics, and is less inclined to have a service, administrative or commercial character. Needless to say, it is not without its value implications, but it is definitely more independent of the institutions it is studying.

As far as the study of media institutions is concerned, the approach is more likely to be from the outside, with a critical policy or problem orientation" (UNESCO 1971). The Leicester study on the media coverage of the anti-involvement in Vietnam demonstration is a good example of this (Halloran et al, 1970).

"Critical research does not ignore problems central to the media, but ideally it never takes these problems as defined by media practitioners or politicians. Ideally, its starting points are the major social issues of our time, as defined from declared theoretical or value positions, not necessarily the major media issues as narrowly defined by the professionals, owners or policy-makers.

At the risk of over-simplification, the main social scientific characteristics of this critical approach which, although with diverse earlier roots, emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s may be summarised as follows. First and foremost is that it deals with communication as a social process; second, that it studies media institutions not in isolation, but together with other institutions, and within the wider social context (nationally and internationally); and third, that it conceptualizes research in terms of structure, organisation, professionalization, socialization and participation.

One of the clear implications of this is that the *status quo*, the existing system, is not taken as sacrosanct, and that all aspects of the communication process should be studied. The factors (historical, economic, political, organisational, technological, professional, and personal) which impinge on the production process and determine what is produced demand close scrutiny as well as those which influence how what is produced is used. In the past the emphasis in research was on use, reaction, effects, influence, etc., not on ownership, control, structure, organisation and production relationships" (UNESCO, 1971) See also the chapter by Murdock and Golding in your Course Book, *Mass Media and Society*, 2005, edited by Curran and Gurevitch.

Activity Five (Allow two hours)

At this point in your study of Unit 2 you should turn to *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (McQuail, 2005), to read Chapters 4 and 5. Notice that very broadly the division which McQuail very tentatively offers between `society' and `culture' approaches approximates to the division between the `political economy' and the `cultural studies' traditions of media research (although his Chapter 4 also includes a number of other theories which would not come under the `political economy' umbrella). Like the argument in section 1.2.1 above, McQuail tends to set aside cultural studies as apart from `social science', and concentrates only on those aspects of cultural studies which in his view approximate to social science. (You may want to ask what relevance such a distinction might have if our primary concern is simply to deepen our understanding of all aspects of media).

As you read, take notes in response to the following questions: -

(i) What does McQuail identify as the significant issues in each of his two major approaches (media and social structure; media and culture)?

(ii) What theories does he identify in each approach, and how do the two groups differ?

(iii) Which of these theories would you consider to correspond to `critical' theory in the sense that the term has been used above?

Comment

(i) While he clearly does not wish to endorse the classical Marxist distinction between `base' (social structure) and `superstructure' (ideas), McQuail's division of these chapters perhaps tends to reflect that polarity. Yet several of the authors and theories he cites in Chapter 4 also appear in Chapter 5. The key issues common to theories of media and society are to do with power, social integration (or disintegration) and control (or dominance-dependency). These issues are also pervasive in his treatment of mass communication and culture, although the specific issues he cites have to do with the relationship between `mass' and `popular' culture; the effects of communications technologies, commodification of culture, globalization, cultural identity and gender and subculture.

(ii) The main theories cited in Chapter 4, some of which you may now be familiar with through Boyd-Barrett and Newbold, 1995, Approaches to Media, have to do with: mass society, Marxism, neo- Marxism, functionalism, critical political economy, media and development, technological determinism and the information society. Although he does not give them very clear labels, the key theories cited in Chapter 5 have to do with: the Frankfurt School, hegemony, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, cultivation, feminism, `redemption of the popular', `media logic', cultural identity and globalization.

The first set of theories tends to focus on media institutions and wider social interests, whereas the second tends to focus on media content, and the ways in which textual meanings are encoded and decoded. One group of theories is mainly concerned with how media content or *media texts* influence or relate to readers: these move from a view of media culture as imposed on readers (the theories associated with the Frankfurt School and the cultivation theorist George Gerbner) through a focus which emphasizes the role of ideology in securing the voluntary compliance of audiences with readings which are not in their own best (class) interests (hegemony), through to theories which concentrate on the ways in which different audiences relate to different texts (initially most closely associated with Birmingham University's CCCS).

Included in this group are a range of theories which are particularly concerned with the relationship between media texts and cultural identity. Another group focuses more directly on actual texts: these include much of feminism (e.g. studies of the ways in which different texts are significantly `gendered'), the study of media `logic' and `formats', notions of polysemy and inter-textuality. As McQuail points out, these theories differ in the extent to which they are media-centric or society-centric; and some theories have both positive and negative variants (e.g. `mass society' theory is viewed negatively by Horkheimer and Adorno, but positively by Shils).

One could argue that most of these theories, across the two chapters, are or could potentially be `critical' in the sense that they all raise, or could potentially raise questions which are independent of the particular interests of the communications industries, they mostly situate the media in broader social, political, economic and cultural contexts, and they go beyond the merely positivistic in their identification of interesting questions to ask. However, some of these theories (e.g. technological determinism) have been too reductionist, not taking account of a sufficiently wide range of social and other contextual factors. Some, such as functionalism, may tend to be conservative (although Marxism could be said to be a form of `functionalist' theory as well, because it sees the media functioning to support capitalism while also arguing the existence of dialectical forces of resistance which could be `dysfunctional' for capitalism).

6. Examples of Critical Research

We need to ask how do policies and strategies lead to research programmes and projects? It is one thing to formulate research policies and strategies, but it is altogether another thing to operationalize these in the shape of research programmes and projects, and it is yet another thing to obtain the supporting funds for such research, particularly if the research has a critical edge to it. But this is the context of research. This is social reality.

In the late 1960's and the 1970's quite a number of projects were designed, executed and reported on at the Leicester Centre (established by the Television Research Committee in 1966) which, in a variety of ways, reflected the aforementioned critical thrust as well as the circumscriptions.

6.1 Projects addressing specific problems

Demonstrations and Communication (Halloran et al, 1970b) reported critical research which covered the whole communication process, including the factors which governed the production of news. It reported a case study in which news coverage was determined by what editors had expected to happen rather than by what actually happened. *Racism and the Mass Media* (Hartmann and Husband, 1974) examined the role of the media with regard to racial prejudice. The alleged relationship between television and delinquency was critically addressed (Halloran et al, 1970c) in a study involving over three hundred delinquents. The role of the school in relation to the mass media was also studied (Murdock et al, 1976), as was television production (Elliott 1972, Tracey 1977, Halloran 1977, Murdock 1977). *Media and Development* (Golding 1974 and 1977, Hartmann 1978) extended the critical research to the international level. In addition, this whole programme was supported by a wide range of theoretical, methodological and political papers, as well as by contributions to international conferences, and the provision of consultancies to media, academic and international institutions such as UNESCO (Halloran 1981 and 1990).

By the mid-seventies critical research was on the map in Great Britain. Not all of it came from Leicester (researchers at Birmingham, for example, were very active in the field of cultural studies), but at that time the bulk of it (i.e. research projects actually carried out) did. Generally, research in Great Britain was developing rapidly, but by no means all of it could easily be classified as critical – nor, one suspects, would most of those involved have wished it to be so classified (Blumler 1981).

6.2 Media and violence

A good example that amply demonstrates both the weaknesses of the conventional approach and the broader, more realistic perspectives of the sociological or critical approach, is to be found in research which has attempted to deal with the alleged media/violence relationship.

At the risk of over-simplification it may be said that the conventional approach, in addition to the many shortcomings previously outlined, was overly media-centred (Halloran 1980, Howitt and Cumberbatch 1975). On the topic of media and violence, its main (at times its sole) focus was violence on the screen (defined in numerous ways), rather than violence in society. True to the effects tradition, its main question was: *what do the media do to people?* and this question was normally answered, sometimes in bizarre situations, via indications of imitation, modelling, increased aggressive drive, attitude change and similar individual reactions.

The sociological approach would turn the question around, so instead of asking "What do the media do to people?" it would ask, "What do people, differently situated in society, with different backgrounds, experiences, cultures, opportunities, associations, skills and competencies make of what the media offer?". Moreover, in keeping with its processual and societal underpinnings, it would also focus on media production and the various functions served by those productions.

One important point to note is that when these sorts of questions are asked, entirely different research strategies are required; questions which take us away from the gross oversimplifications associated with an obsession with linear causality – that certain forms or types of media content lead to certain types of behaviour in the viewer.

In examining this sociological approach with regard to the media and violence in some detail it must be emphasised that in research, as in the public debate, we are not dealing with a single phenomenon. Violence may be categorised in several ways - there is collective or political violence and personal or individual violence. Collective violence, seen from an historical perspective, is much more normal and historically rooted than is commonly accepted. Much of what we now accept as legitimate, even as laudable, stems from violent action in the past.

Violence is frequently thought of in terms of assassinations, murders, riots, demonstrations, assaults, robberies, rapes and acts of vandalism. In fact, for many, this sort of `illegitimate' behaviour represents the totality of violence. But there are those who would include war, police behaviour, corporal and certainly capital punishment. A still broader definition might include poverty, deprivation, economic exploitation and discrimination. In this connection it should be noted that society may contribute to `illegal' violence by the approval it gives to certain forms of `legitimated' violence.

When violence is examined within the appropriate historical and cultural contexts it can be seen that it is culturally, and even sub-culturally defined. Some forms of violence are acceptable and approved, others are not. But the acceptance and approval usually depend more on the

objective, the perpetrator and the victim than on the nature and form of the violent behaviour. Media policies and programmes, public attitudes to the media, and even research approaches reflect this. The roots of violent behaviour, as with the concept of violence itself, must also be studied within the appropriate national, historical, cultural and economic contexts. It is worth noting that few of those who have systematically and scientifically studied violent behaviour have cited the media as a major cause. The roots of such behaviour are usually found elsewhere in society. Our task is to see whether the media relate to violence *in any way*, and not just in the simple, direct causal ways of popular speculation. It is also worth noting in this respect that the media-centred, conventional researchers seem to be totally unaware of the work of other scholars (psychiatrists, sociologists, criminologists, historians, legal scholars and political scientists). This is a good example of the isolation of so much mass communication research which was mentioned in the last section.

6.2.1 Different approaches to the alleged relationship between media and violence

Although the roots of violent behaviour may not be the main concern of media researchers they cannot be ignored, and the media/violence relationship must be studied within a wider framework than is normally used. To adopt this approach is not to suggest that the media have no influence. However, it must be emphasised once more that in much of the conventional research the role of the media and the process of influence were not properly understood. The restriction of the notion of influence to imitation, copying, increased aggressive drive and attitude change prevented such an understanding.

Clearly, violence is not unrelated to frustration, even though the relationship is not necessarily a direct one. Consequently, we might ask what, if anything, do the media contribute to frustration in our society and, through this, to aggression and violence? The main values in a commercially oriented, industrialised, urban society, where advertising plays an important part in media operations and in the economy generally, will be related to the achievement of material prosperity, and much effort, time and money will be expended on the promotion of this. Advertising seeks to make people dissatisfied, and to stimulate them to want more, irrespective of their economic circumstances. There is much more emphasis in the media and elsewhere on materialistic goals than on the legitimate ways of achieving these goals. For the deprived sections of the community the daily stimulation could exacerbate feelings of frustration and discontent.

Of course, there are other agents of frustration in society, but it would be foolish to ignore the possibility that the media, in their presentation of materialistic norms and values (by the portrayal of affluent lifestyles as well as by advertising) may increase expectations unrealistically, aggravate existing problems and thereby contribute to frustration and aggression.

This, however, is not the sort of relationship people normally have in mind when they express concern about the media/violence relationship. The condemnation of media content is highly selective. Not even all forms of media violence are condemned, any more than are all forms of violent behaviour.

The sociological approach, then, encourages this kind of holistic critical thinking and, when applied to the study of news, offers an entirely different perspective on the role of the media in society (Halloran, 1990).

The process of media influence is more indirect, more complex, and perhaps even more far-reaching than is commonly realised. Violence and deviant behaviour, particularly in their extreme forms, are extensively covered by the media in most Western societies, and another example of media influence may be seen in the way such media portrayals play a part in defining problems and in giving focus to public concern.

It is not unreasonable to hypothesise that what people take from the media might influence their views about the nature and extent of violence in society. There have been different interpretations of the available evidence, but the main point here is to draw attention to one of the several ways in which the media may be related to public perceptions of violent behaviour.

This approach enables us to appreciate that the media help to set the social/political agenda. They select, organise, emphasise, define and amplify. They convey meanings and perspectives, offer solutions, associate certain groups with certain types of values and behaviour, create anxiety, and legitimate or justify the status quo and the prevailing systems of social control. They provide `the pictures of the world' that are available to us and, in turn, these pictures may structure our beliefs and possible modes of action. It is in terms of these possibilities that we must examine the influence of the media.

6.3 Selecting from the agenda

The media, of course, do not work in isolation. The interactions between media experiences on the one hand and non-media experiences on the other, which differ from issue to issue, from person to person, and from country to country must also be studied.

The media may set the agenda in a regular, ordered and predictable fashion. Choice and selectivity in attention, perception and interpretation are thereby circumscribed, but they are not eliminated. The media portrayal of a riot, for example, may assist in the dissemination of `riot skills', may produce a reactionary backlash, or may encourage an increase in social awareness and responsibility, which could lead to ameliorative action. Certain meanings may be predominant in the presentation of the riot, but these are still susceptible to a selectivity which reflects, among other things, personal and group experiences in a differentiated and stratified society.

One of the reasons why the media operate as they do is because readers and viewers have to be won and kept. For the daily news media, persons and events (particularly negative ones) are the basic units. Events are more likely to be reported if they occur within the space of one day. A demonstration is a news event, but the development of the related political movement does not have the correct `frequency' for the news production process. Consequently, violence becomes directly related to the events in the streets, and this tends to exclude background, explanations and context. One of the first major projects undertaken by the Leicester Centre in 1968 on the media coverage of anti-Vietnam demonstrations in London provided most revealing illustrations of these points (Halloran et al, 1970b).

This orientation, which stems from the organisation of the news process and its basic assumptions, could lead in another context to stereotyping and to the association of certain groups with violence, as well as to the acceptance of violence as a legitimate way of dealing with problems or as a necessary form of retaliation. Perceptions derived from these presentations may even influence `official' attitudes, so that they come to match the

stereotypes. The interpretations of the problem are therefore reinforced, and all sides behave as `expected' (Cohen et al, 1973).

One other consequence of this type of presentation could be to play down alternative conceptions of social order; the status quo of power and control is maintained, conflict and dissent being managed in the interest of the authorities.

It is said, particularly by those who favour a law-and-order stance, that the media offer support for the demonstrators and rioters by providing publicity, and that this may encourage disruptive behaviour. `Copycat' behaviour cannot be ruled out, but there is no convincing evidence to support it. The presence of cameras may even reduce the likelihood of violence (Tumber, 1982).

The media have been seen as the enemy of the police, particularly when photographing police violence. But they have also been criticised by the demonstrators or strikers for being part of the establishment and for facilitating police identification. Incidentally, the position of the camera, more often behind police lines than not, is very important in creating a perspective.

6.4 The wider context of media influence

The media have influence, then, but the degree to which a demonstration or riot becomes an effective method of communication depends on factors other than the media; the media may simply reinforce the contending positions.

In their research Hansen and Murdock, 1985, attempted to move on from the simpler assumptions about the way the media relay or reproduce dominant ideology. They see news as a field of continual conflict in which competing discourses struggle for publicity and legitimacy and are transformed and worked on as they pass through the news-making process.

However, according to this view, although there is no longer the same emphasis on predictability of news outcomes, the activation of the themes available from history and popular imagery in the production of news still leads to `meaning' being fixed quite early in the reporting process. Moreover, it is fixed in such a way that riot is associated with crowd and against community and public. Political significance is thereby devalued.

The views from both `right' (the insurgent's friend) and `left' (an instrument of state) may be too simple to describe a complex situation. Non-news programmes, including non- fiction, are not subject to the conditions surrounding the news process. The news, and some other programmes, are relatively `closed', generally favouring the `official perspective'. But other programmes may be more `open' so that alternative views are presented. Consequently, there is scope for meanings to be negotiated from what is made available at any given time. But, as research on televising terrorism (Schlesinger et al, 1983) shows, this diversity is limited both in terms of what is available and the use that is made of this. Consequently, although the situation is not quite as closed as some would claim, the negotiations are inevitably confined within restrictive frameworks.

The likelihood is, then, that even allowing for this `openness' the media, television in particular, in portraying disturbances, will reinforce the simplistic analyses of complex situations, and this could lead - not directly by copying, but indirectly in relation to implied solutions - to an

exacerbation of the situation. It is certainly not likely to lead to an increased understanding of the social situations which gave rise to the disturbances.

6.5 Positive functions of media violence?

Generally, media violence is viewed negatively, but there is also the possibility that the portrayal of violence may serve a `positive' function (at least from one standpoint) by acting as an instrument of social control and maintaining the status quo. The media coverage of violence may also enhance normative consensus and community integration. Where people have little first-hand knowledge of violent crime they depend on the media for most of their information. The media inform, create awareness, redefine the boundaries of what is acceptable and structure perceptions of the nature and extent of violence. In doing this they may bring people together in opposition to disorder, reinforce a belief in common values, facilitate the imposition of sanctions, and strengthen social control. But in order to do this the violence must be made visible throughout society - hence the importance of the media.

Although many of the hypotheses which stem from this approach have still to be put to the test, there is nothing new in the views which regard coverage of crime and violence as creating a sense of solidarity within the community by arousing moral concern.

As illustrated at the beginning of this section, there is much more to critical mass communication research than violence and news, but the above illustrations of the media/violence relationship and news have been deliberately selected because they deal with issues which are at the centre of public debate, which have been intensively and extensively researched and which (most importantly as far as this unit is concerned) provide the most significant examples of the differences between the conventional and critical sociological approaches.

Activity Six (Allow 2 hours)

If you have sufficient time in this week of your study you will find it helpful to take a look at Chapters 17, 18 and 19 of McQuail's Mass Communication Theory (McQuail, 2005) for a detailed discussion of media effects and influence. Consult Chapter 12 of McQuail, 2005, and Chapter 9 of Mass Media and Society edited by Curran and Gurevitch, 2005, if you would like to read further at this point about news values and production.

In the light of your reading, consider the view that the developments in mass communication research over the past forty years are best seen in terms of the different questions that are now asked about media influence and media operations generally.

7. Progress and Obstacles to Progress

Research - certainly the research that is actually carried out - is not just a matter of ideas, theories and methods. As we noted earlier, research may be influenced by many factors; some research may be encouraged and other research discouraged or prevented. In this section we shall focus on the obstacles put in the way of certain types of research, repeating that it is important to note the questions that have not been asked as well as those that have. Attention will be given to the obstacles external to social science (e.g. political, commercial, professional) although, as we shall see, these are not entirely separate from the internal obstacles, i.e. the nature of social science with its disagreements and lack of consensus.

We might ask: what is progress? On this score it should be clear by now that progress is regarded here in terms of the development of a critical, sociological approach to the media and the communication process - an approach which challenges rather than serves. Of course, this would not be everyone's idea of progress (McQuail, 1994).

So, using this criterion it is possible to claim that, at least in the realm of ideas, considerable progress has been made in mass communication research over the past thirty years. Nevertheless, it is important to remember with regard to criteria such as research expenditure, the quantity of research actually carried out and the number of publications throughout the field, that the conventional approach is still very much in evidence.

7.1 Obstacles to research

I first drew attention to one aspect of this problem in an article I wrote over thirty years ago: *What Do We Need To Know - Are We Going To Be Allowed To Find Out?* (Halloran 1973). For even if social scientists agree on what ought to be done, there is no guarantee that they will be allowed to do it. The question, `are we going to be allowed to find out?' is as problematic today as it was over a quarter of a century ago - perhaps even more so. We must ask why it is still necessary to call for an increased research effort in order to answer the questions that were first articulated many years ago, and that have been on the agenda ever since.

Leaving aside, for the moment, further discussion about the shortcomings of mass communication research - (Is it capable of providing an informed base for policy formulation, even if there were no external obstacles?) - let us turn to the political context of international research as it existed in the 1970s and see if we can find any obstacles there.

The first relevant point has to do with a UNESCO conference, held in Montreal in 1969 (Halloran, 1970a) and often referred to as a watershed in mass communication research and, more specifically, in research and critical thought about international communication. It was followed by the development of a well-financed and well-orchestrated counter-attack against critical research (particularly against UNESCO's involvement) by members of the international communication establishment, such as the news agencies, leading to the eventual retreat of UNESCO from the critical arena.

The main hope of quite a number of researchers at the time of the Montreal meeting in 1969 was that some form of critical approach - not homogeneous, not representing any given ideological position, but diverse and pluralistic - would take over from the conventional research which, until then, had characterised both the field in general, and UNESCO's research policies and programmes in particular.

As already noted, this conventional type of research had far-reaching policy implications. For example, as far as communication development in the Third World was concerned, implicit in these models of research (but rarely explicitly stated) was the idea that development in the Third World should be measured in terms of the adoption and assimilation of western technology and culture. The main emphasis of the work was on increasing efficiency within an accepted and unquestioned political framework. In general, prior to Montreal, many of the research and projects sponsored by UNESCO, deficient in theories, models, concepts and methods, (Golding, 1974) tended to legitimate and reinforce the existing system and the established order, and in the Third World it tended to strengthen economic and cultural dependence rather than promote independence. Not surprisingly, it was this conventional research tradition and its advocates

which were approved and accepted by the international communication establishment, and it was the break from this tradition at Montreal which they deplored, and which prompted a counter-attack.

It was only after Montreal that the questions raised in research about mass communication became more relevant, challenging and provocative at both intellectual and political levels. It was this that caused all the trouble. Those who control international media and communication operations, and those who serve them, were clearly not interested in criticism, challenge, stimulation or alternative ideas.

Immediately after Montreal UNESCO-related research (at least in certain areas) became more critical, and eventually this led to the production of research reports which, for the first time, developed a holistic, contextualized account of, among other things, the nature of the flow of international information, describing the influence of historical, economic and political factors, and pointing to the inevitable outcomes of the operation of the `free-flow' doctrine (the view that there should be no regulation of the international distribution of media information) in a world where national and regional communication resources and capabilities were so unbalanced: see, for example, UNESCO 1971, Nordenstreng 1973.

Such critical exposure of this and other features of international communication provoked an attack on UNESCO's research policy from those who, until that time, had shown little interest in research other than that which reinforced their position. Prior to this there had been very few, if any, systematic or sustained challenges from research to any established international communication structures or policies. What research there was had supported the *status quo*. What some saw at the time as obvious inadequacies had been hidden for years. Clearly, the opening up of these issues was regretted by many of those who spoke and wrote in terms of "freedom". Those who voiced disquiet by means of their research were attacked by those who so obviously benefited from the silence of the past (Righter, 1978).

One of the outcomes of all this was pressure to shift research away from such questions as "the right to communicate" to "more concrete problems", although these were never clearly defined. Rationalised in terms of the necessary `depoliticization' of research, this was an attempt to put the clock back to the days when the function of research was to serve the system as it was, and not to question, challenge or attempt to change it. But research which does not pose questions inevitably supports the *status quo* (Lerner 1958, Frey 1973). Allegations about `politicization' were usually related to the belief that conventional research was value-free and truly scientific, and that any research which departed from this "scientific approach" was "unscientific", "philosophical", "qualitative" and "politically motivated".

The main point is that this is an example of how a well-organised and well-financed set of negative and hostile reactions stifled a research effort which was clearly geared to the public interest. As became clear at the time, research which concerned itself with societal or public interest objectives or international imbalance, and which sought to inform policy-makers, was not what was required by those who controlled the purse strings, and therefore had the power. Moreover, from that point onwards what research stemmed from UNESCO could hardly be regarded as critical. "Good" (acceptable) research was redefined. The policies adopted, the researchers commissioned, the questions asked, the funds allocated, the publications supported all reflect this change, and eventually there were further reflections in the body of knowledge about international communications. This is how knowledge is generated.

"Globalization" is the "in word" today, but on the whole this is debated and fostered by those who formulate policy and provide investment, with little consideration for the wider social and cultural implications of such developments. These multi-national decision-makers are not likely to promote or support critical research, and those who might be interested in such research are not likely to have the necessary resources. UNESCO remains quiet. The repercussions of the counter-attack of the 1970s are still with us.

Activity Seven (Allow 45 minutes)

Now read Chapter 17 by Hamelink in your Course Book, Questioning the Media, by Downing et al., 1995. This account of imbalance in flows of information represents a line of discussion which grew out of the UNESCO debate about a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) to which reference is made in the preceding section. In what ways do you think it represents the `critical' tradition?

Comment

Hamelink's concerns are clearly not to do with the profitability and effectiveness of particular communications industries, so this is definitely not a piece of writing supporting `administrative' concerns. His principal concern is with what he calls the `peripheral' nations, and how their status as `peripherals' in the world economy is linked to global information flows. Thus he has a `public interest' concern, on behalf of the `peripheral' nations, which he justifies in terms of the implications of such imbalance for the ability of such countries to tackle problems such as poverty and development. He analyzes information within a holistic framework in which the nature of the relationships between the economies and economic activities of the `core' and `peripheral' nations are central. He defines information broadly to accommodate such categories, for example, as news, scientific, trading and military information. He identifies the producers and institutions of information. Information imbalance is explained not only in relationship to contemporary relationships but also to historical relationships that begin with colonial expansion. He also locates information within a broader cultural range of relationships which include education. In these ways, therefore, the analysis might be said to be `critical'.

8. Co-operation and Independence

The total communication process, including the ownership, control, organisation and operations of media institutions cannot be studied adequately unless the media institutions agree to cooperate. The type of research carried out also depends on the availability of funds and the policies and interests of grant-giving bodies. This section will examine some specific examples of these further constraints on the research process.

Although there are differences from country to country, even from institution to institution, lessons similar to those illustrated in the last section may also be learned from attempts to develop co-operative research exercises between the academic research community on the one hand, and media institutions, media practitioners and policy-makers on the other. The research referred to, of course, is independent, critical research (not the research which simply aims to serve the institution or industry on its own terms), and in particular that kind of research which may require the media institutions or communication industry to provide access and facilities, not to mention financial support (Halloran 1990, 1991).

Not surprisingly, media practitioners and policy-makers, although stating that they would welcome help from research, tend to be selective in their reactions to, and use of research results. Amongst other things, they prefer researchers to deal with problems that have been identified and defined by the media, and they rarely welcome "external" definitions from independent research which suggest that there may be other problems which are more important, both to society and to communication.

Understandably, they do not welcome research which challenges their basic values and deeply held beliefs, or which questions their well-established and accepted professional ways of doing things. Why should they? It is as well to remember that the two groups (researchers and those who work in the media/communication industries, and policy-makers) may have few, if any, common points of reference.

However, we need to recognise that if co-operation has been lacking on vital issues - and it has - then this need not be entirely the fault of those working in the media and the communication industries. Research obviously has an important part to play, but it is not without its limitations and shortcomings. Whilst we may accept that research is essential in order to provide the base for informed policy-making, it would be misleading and very unwise for researchers to create false expectations, and to suggest that successful formulae and clear answers could be produced at short notice. Unfortunately, there are some researchers who appear all too ready to do this. It does research no good at all if it claims too much, and promises more than it is able to deliver. Researchers might also learn to present their findings in a more comprehensible form.

When we deal with policy research, or policy-oriented research, we must recognise that we are also confronted with other problems about the nature of social science, for there are those who insist that, in the final analysis, social science should never accept an exclusively therapeutic or problem-solving role. If both the aims and instruments of research are controlled, as they could be (and we have seen examples of this), how can there be the autonomy and independence of enquiry which some would claim is the *sine qua non* of any truly scientific endeavour? When we make our research recommendations, plan our strategies of intervention, and seek greater involvement, can we avoid the clash between policy interests on the one hand, and the requirements of social scientific enquiry on the other? Or even more fundamentally, as we saw in the first section, are we in fact in agreement as to what the basic requirements of social scientific enquiry really are? Irving Horowitz argued, many years ago, that where policy needs rule the critical effort would be the exception rather than the rule, and deterioration in the quality of social science would be inevitable. Some academic researchers may not be sufficiently aware of this danger when they make their proposals for research (Horowitz, 1968).

In fact, Horowitz maintained that the realities of the situation were such that the utility of the social sciences to policy-making bodies depended on the maintenance of some degree of separation between policy-making and social science. As mentioned earlier, a distinction may be made between policy research and policy-oriented research - the former serving the policy-makers on their terms, the latter addressing the same policy issues (or at least including such issues on the research agenda), but addressing them externally and independently, and with a view, where appropriate, to proposing alternatives with regard to both means and ends (Halloran, 1980).

Relationships between social science and policy differ from country to country and from time to time. In some countries the research effort may be geared entirely to national policy, and there is a clear understanding of the role of the social scientist. In others, the two spheres might be formally regarded as completely independent of each other. In practice different parts of the

research sphere will probably have different relationships with the policy sphere. In principle, the pattern can vary from complete servitude to genuine critical independence, but there is more than a suspicion that independence and purity are usually inversely related to power, status and influence in decision-making. There is almost bound to be considerable confusion and uncertainty about the role of social science with regard to policy. This problem is still with us. Stay outside, valuing independence, and risk being ignored or opposed. Go inside and serve rather than challenge.

In the previous section of this unit we described an example of the media's reaction to critical research at the international level. A further illustration of this tendency is to be found in the BBC's reaction to what the Corporation apparently perceived as the threat from critical research in Great Britain in the 1970s. A researcher, not from Great Britain, and not known for his critical orientation (Blumler 1980, p.38; Hardt 1992, pp.100-115; Gitlin, 1978) was commissioned to provide proposals for social research on broadcasting. The proposals were duly produced and were criticised at the time as "putting the clock back". Little, if any, research stemmed directly from these proposals, but was it ever intended that it should? Perhaps the aim was to pre-empt by offering an alternative to the critical (Halloran 1978, Katz 1977). It is also worth noting that such is the state of social science and social scientists (marked differences, lack of agreement), that policy-makers and media managers rarely experience any difficulty in finding a social scientist to counter what another social scientist has said.

If we accept that our main aim, as researchers or social scientists, is to contribute to making society a better place to live in, then we can do this by transcending rather than by accepting the square world of political and sociological consensus. We do not have to be over-concerned with the restitution of normative patterns, nor need we fall into the trap of examining the costs of dissensus and ignoring the price we pay for consensus. We should address ourselves to social problems without necessarily identifying ourselves with the values of the establishment (Horowitz, 1968). But, as we have seen, there could be a price to pay for this.

The agencies, trusts and councils which fund research have their own special interests and priorities and these, not surprisingly, lead to certain types of research being favoured and certain questions more likely to be addressed than others. Moreover, on occasions attempts have been made to stifle publications if the research results being reported did not fit the preconceived ideas of the sponsors.

Publishers also have their policies and interests. They also have commercial considerations to take into account. All of these play an important part, not only in disseminating the results of research, but in conferring status and the seal of approval. In social science the link between status and publications on the one hand, and "quality" and usefulness on the other, is not always self-evident.

9. Internal Obstacles to Progress

Not all the obstacles to progress are from outside the social sciences. In this section we shall return to some of the points raised in the first section about the nature of social science and the approaches and attitudes of social scientists noting that, in some cases, the internal situation may be conducive to external opposition.

Let us assume that researchers are asking to be taken seriously about their work on the role of the media in society. They are claiming that they have a worthwhile contribution to make. But

this might be questioned. How good is their past record? What have they contributed? It has been said that when they are not trivial they are contentious and dogmatic, and that they are rarely relevant. Whatever the truth of this, surely they are not justified in attributing all of their shortcomings to external obstacles and opposition. Perhaps they should put their own house in order before others will take them seriously.

We have to consider the possibility that, to the non-social scientist, including the policy- maker and the media practitioner, social scientists may not present a very convincing picture. As we have seen, the general field is inhabited by scholars from different disciplines, with different values, aims and purposes, who seek to construct reality in their own ways. The complexity of subject matter, and the embryonic stage of development of the subject are amongst the factors that make this (ideally complementary perspective) inevitable. Nevertheless, it doesn't help matters when media practitioners and policy-makers know they can find a researcher to attack or defend virtually any position.

That the field of mass communication is multi-disciplinary is not in question. In fact, this is one of the main problems. It is further exacerbated by the fact that not only are there differences between the various "disciplines" within the field (however wide or narrow the field is regarded), but that, as previously noted, there are also grave differences and discontinuities within any given "discipline". Consensus is not the order of the day at either level. Consequently if, as a scientist might hold, consensus is a sign of maturity, then social science is far from being mature.

But perhaps, at this stage in the development of our field of study, maturity in this sense should not be our main concern. It was argued earlier that social science should entail a systematic study of society, and of the relationship of individual members within society from the various standpoints of the contributing disciplines. Whether or not we have yet arrived at an appropriate multi-disciplinary blend is indeed arguable. Social reality - real life - is multi-faceted, and its adequate study requires various theories and approaches applied together. No single approach is capable of providing more than the partial picture of social reality permitted by its own narrow perspectives and conceptual limitations. In this sense we should welcome eclecticism, not apologise for it. But, at the same time, we must recognise the implications of this.

Let us remind ourselves that social science is fundamentally different from the natural and physical sciences, amongst other things because of the differences, discontinuities and lack of consensus already mentioned. Moreover, these differences and conflicts cannot be explained independently of the cultures in which the various models and concepts were conceived, formulated and are now applied.

Despite the confusion and lack of certainty and credibility that stem from this, we have to accept it and face up to it. In fact, as we saw earlier, it is the failure on the part of those who stress the "scientific component" of social science to accept this and to unwisely claim a universality for their work that creates false expectations and exacerbates the problem.

The lack of agreement within the social sciences has implications for research which go far beyond any academic debate. This can be seen by examining the way in which the Social Science Research Council (now the Economic and Social Research Council) in Great Britain dealt with mass communication research from the mid-1960s to the present day (Halloran, 1991).

In 1964 the Council received the aforementioned recommendations of the Television Research Committee about the need to develop research into the media and the communication process but, although accepting and approving these, it did very little else. On two or three occasions in the twenty years which followed, advisory panels or committees were established to look at the field again, but nothing substantial emerged. Indeed, the clear impression was that there was no link or communication between these panels. It would appear that the various panels were not even aware of what had gone before, or of the earlier recommendations.

One of the main problems was that there was no special committee within the Council to deal with mass communications - it was not a `proper' academic subject. Consequently a proposal submitted to the Council for funding might be dealt with by the Psychology Committee, the Sociology Committee or the Political Science Committee. In some cases all three committees might have their say. When this happened, consensus was unlikely, and either the research proposals were turned down, or accommodating compromises were made. The latter happened with one of the first studies of media and race in Great Britain (Hartmann and Husband, 1974).

Peer review is valued in academic circles, but in circumstances such as these, e.g. the refereeing of research proposals and the commenting on and reviewing of publications, the disciplinary orientation (at least) of the referees is crucial. Gatekeepers are important in deciding what is "good" social science - and there are many different gatekeepers at different gates.

10. Extending Research to Different Cultures

This section will explore the possibility that the problems of social science, particularly with regard to its internal obstacles, are exacerbated when research is carried out in the Third World.

The general situation in social science, with its discontinuities, lack of consensus, and what (at least at present) appears to be the inevitable contestability of its theories and methods, becomes even more problematic when we add geographical and stage-of-development components. One has only to have experience of an international comparative research exercise to realise that cultural, regional and national differences profoundly influence the research effort at all stages and levels (Halloran 1990, chapter 9).

How does this condition relate to research in or about Third World countries and international communication generally? "What are we exporting from the so-called developed world? How suitable are the exported models for the conditions it is intended that they should address? Are political, commercial, cultural and media imperialisms being followed by a research imperialism? What forms of indigenisation are required, and to what degree should they be applied? These are just a few of the questions which should be asked, both directly in relation to mass communication research, and more widely with regard to universality and relativity in the social sciences" (Halloran, 1995).

When we examine social science research within the international context, and take into account exports and imports of textbooks, articles and journals; citations, references and footnotes; employment of experts (even in international agencies), and the funding, planning and execution of research, then it becomes clear that we have yet another example of a dependency situation. "This is a situation which tends to be characterised by a one-way flow of values, ideas, models, methods and resources from north to south. It may even be seen more specifically as a flow from the Anglo-Saxon language community to the rest of the world and, perhaps even more specifically still within the aforementioned parameters, as an instance of a

one-way traffic system which enabled USA-dominated social science of a conventional nature to penetrate cultures in many parts of the world which were quite different from the culture of the USA. It has been argued that, as the USA emerged as a super-power in social science, like it did in other spheres, even what little input was available from other sources tended to be excluded" (Halloran, 1995).

It is now quite widely recognised that, in terms of communication research (interests, theories, concepts, methods and findings) much of what was exported from the USA post-World War II, and the implications of these exports, was on the whole detrimental. The exports certainly did not serve to increase our understanding of the Third World and its communication requirements, nor did they facilitate development.

"Daniel Lerner's work on *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Lerner, 1958) - widely used as a model of development throughout the Third World but not conceived with the Third World in mind - was a prime example of this, irrespective of whether or not it is regarded as an artefact of the cold-war politics of that time. But this is not simply a matter of unsuitable exports - it is a much more fundamental matter of bad social science *per se*. The point being made here (as was made earlier in discussing conventional research) is that the principles and models underpinning this type of research would not have been adequate in any situation, including the situation in the USA. To export such models simply compounded the felony, so to speak. It was not solely a Third World problem - although it certainly was this - it was essentially a social science problem" (Halloran 1995). Rohan Samarajiwa's exposure of the factors impinging on this work provides an admirable illustration of what he calls the `murky beginnings' of the communication and development field, and the failure of this seriously flawed but influential research to free itself from its cultural, political and economic circumscriptions (Samarajiwa, 1985).

"This takes us back to the questions already raised about the very nature, potential and universal applicability of social science, no matter how free it may be from the aforementioned conditioning. We have plenty of basic problems at the national or regional levels, but we must now ask how can we possibly deal with the increasing diversification within our general field of communication research which inevitably stems from the extension of our investigations to cultures outside the cultures within which most of the ideas and tools we use were conceived, developed and articulated?

In general terms, the answer frequently given to this question is along the lines of `Indigenization at Several Levels'" (Halloran, 1995). Unfortunately, this proposed solution is often put forward without any apparent recognition that, in certain circumstances, it could lead to increasing dissonance, discontinuity and lack of consensus.

"The cry for the indigenization of social scientific and mass communication research cannot easily be dismissed, but it needs to be treated with reserve in certain areas, particularly in relation to some of the ways in which it has already been applied". We may readily accept the need for emerging nations and regions to determine their own research policies, priorities and strategies, rather than having them externally imposed, as was the case so often in the past. Moreover, the need for home-based institutions, housing indigenous staff capable of carrying out the necessary research in their own countries also appears to be generally acceptable - at least on the surface. I make this "surface" qualification because, for many years now, the case has been fiercely argued that the situation would improve to the benefit of Third World countries if only the nationals of those countries could be given the opportunity, and the resources, to enable them to carry out the research. But this is far too simplistic a view, as our experience

makes clear, for many of these nationals have been trained as conventional researchers, mostly in the West, and seem unable - perhaps sometimes unwilling - to free themselves from the ideological shackles of their educational and professional mentors. In this way they may even exacerbate the situation, and perpetuate the error by giving the "alien import" a national seal of approval.

The problem of indigenization is central to the more fundamental problems of social science with regard to universalism and relativism and as to whether we should be pursuing consensus (in part or in whole), or accepting the inevitability of dissensus.

"Having rightly rejected the absolutism of positivism and all its universalistic implications for international research, we must be careful not to jump out of the frying pan into the fire. In rejecting a position, there is no logical necessity to wholeheartedly adopt its mirror opposite. Yet some do this. The danger in this unthinking, knee-jerk reaction is that knowledge is reduced to mere perspectivalism - a riot of subjective visions - and a form of anarchy prevails. There are many examples today, inside and outside our particular field within social science, which demonstrate the tyranny of the absolutism of non-absolutism, where anything goes and where plural subjectivism frequently masquerades as knowledge. Useful comparative research cannot thrive in such conditions which, incidentally, are also conducive to political and educational paralysis.

So, in our explorations, we have to navigate between Scylla and Charybdis in the hope of eventually reaching a safe port. An accompanying difficulty is that, as yet, we haven't quite decided on our destination - which port do we wish to reach? The very nature of social science impinges once more. Choices will have to be made and, in the end, we can't dodge the issues of validity or values.

In comparative international studies we need to start with an acceptance of differences at all levels. But it is quite legitimate - in fact necessary - to proceed from this base and attempt to identify, establish, articulate and combine what, if anything, is common. As Paul Hirst argues, different ways of life may be related by ties of symmetric reciprocity, and we may eventually find common denominators - universals which reflect the nature and needs of every culture (Hirst, 1993). At least this possibility should not be ruled out, but it has to be established in our research, not simply assumed, taken for granted, or dogmatically asserted" (Halloran, 1995).

11. Checklist

- The social scientific approach (which is not the only approach) to the study of the media and the communication process calls for systematic and disciplined research, a respect for evidence and verifiable knowledge.

- There are many different approaches within social science. It has been argued that `social' and `scientific' are not compatible.

- Research is not developed and is not carried out in a social/political vacuum. Many factors - economic, political, cultural and disciplinary impinge on research which produces a version of reality.

- The history of mass communication research is a short one. In the early days the bulk of the research, mostly emanating from the USA, was influenced by media and commercial

interests. It was positivistic and social-psychological, and served the system rather than challenged it.

- From the late 1960s a more critical, sociological, holistic approach (with some European influences) emerged. It never predominated, but by placing the media and the total communication process in the wider social context - society - it facilitated a challenge to the status quo, and a consideration of alternatives.

- The above developments are well illustrated in changes in the questions that were addressed by research. Media and violence, media and development and news values are good examples.

- Despite these developments, communication research has not had a noticeable impact on policy.

- This is probably due to obstacles, internal and external, to social science.

- Externally, policy-makers and media managers are not likely to welcome research which might threaten their interests and established ways of doing things.

- Internally, the multi-disciplinary nature of social science and mass communication research, with its lack of consensus and numerous disagreements, has so far precluded the development of an agreed corpus of knowledge. Currently, a social scientist may be found to attack or defend virtually any position.

- In seeking to apply research to policy, the question of the autonomy and independence of research has to be considered. Independence may be inversely related to impact and influence.

- The usefulness and applicability of research may be further questioned when considering research in the Third World.

- One needs to guard against a form of research imperialism in the export of theories, concepts, models and methods from one culture to another.

- Indigenization may help, but the main problem of universality/relativity, which is at the heart of social science and mass communication research, has to be faced.

- Ideally, we must recognise the differences (and the embryonic stage of development of our field), and strive to find common denominators - universals - which will reflect the nature and needs of every culture.

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Appendix

A further note on `conventional research'.

Conventional research is often associated with positivism and behaviourism in psychological and social research. Paul Hartmann (1987) defined positivism in the following terms:

`Positivism holds that nothing should be taken to be real or true unless it can positively be shown to be real or true; nothing should simply be assumed without evidence' (Hartmann, 1987, p.6). [Hartmann, P. (1987) `Media Research: Aspects of Method' in *Language and Communication in Society:* an Introduction. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.]

Positivism was the basis for behaviourism in psychology. In behaviourism, only evidence which is based on observation is permissible. This excluded the concepts of `mind', or `consciousness', or concepts that referred to inner states, as these were not observable. The object was to relate observable behaviour to observable environmental stimuli - the `stimulus-response' or S-R approach. Usable concepts had to be capable of being operationalized: that is to say, for any concept or variable it had to be possible to specify precisely how its presence or extent could be recognized or assessed in terms of concrete, observable, and replicable procedures. Greater precision was achieved where the stimulus and the response were isolated under experimental or laboratory conditions in a way that eliminated or held as constant any extraneous factors that could possibly interfere or alter the relationship between stimulus and response. This emphasis on `facts', however, encouraged the development of research where things could be measured as opposed to research which was important, the development of

research that was so far removed from real-life conditions as to weaken its generalizability, while the concentration on `facts' discouraged the development of theory.