

EDITED BY

KARIN GWINN WILKINS, THOMAS TUFTE
AND RAFAEL OBREGON

GLOBAL HANDBOOKS IN
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
RESEARCH

**The Handbook of
Development
Communication
and Social Change**

The Handbook of Development Communication and Social Change

Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research

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**Karin Gwinn Wilkins, Thomas Tufte,
and Rafael Obregon**

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Series Editor's Preface

Welcome to the Global Handbooks in Media and Communication Research series. This grew out of the idea that the field needed a series of state-of the-art reference works that was truly international. The International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), with a membership from over 80 countries, is uniquely positioned to offer a series that covers the central concerns of media and communications theory in a global arena.

Each of these substantial books contains newly written essays commissioned from a range of international authors, showcasing the best critical scholarship in the field. Each is pedagogical in the best sense, accessible to students and clear in its approach and presentation. Theoretical chapters map the terrain of an area both historically and conceptually, providing incisive overviews of arguments in the field. The examples of empirical work are drawn from many different countries and regions, so that each volume offers rich material for comparative analysis.

These handbooks are international in the best sense: in scope, authorship and mindset. They explore a range of approaches and issues across different political and cultural regions, reflecting the global reach of the IAMCR. The aim is to offer scholarship that moves away from simply reproducing Westcentric models and assumptions. The series formulates new models and asks questions that bring communication scholarship into a more comprehensive global conversation.

The IAMCR (<http://iamcr.org>) was established in Paris in 1957. It is an accredited NGO attached to UNESCO. It is a truly international association, with a membership around the world and conferences held in different regions that address the most pressing issues in media and communication research. Its members promote global inclusiveness and excellence within the best traditions of critical research in the field.

This series supports those goals.

Annabelle Sreberny
Past President of IAMCR and Series Editor
London, December 2010

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While many people have inspired our work in the field as well as our dedication to this Handbook, we particularly want to thank our students, colleagues, and families for their encouragement, and the many activists and citizens who devote themselves to social change.

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Introduction

**Karin Gwinn Wilkins, Thomas Tufte,
and Rafael Obregon**

This *Handbook of Development Communication and Social Change* offers a valuable resource for advocates, scholars, and communities engaged in long-term and comprehensive struggles for social justice. The strategic use of communication and media as tools and processes to articulate and propel social, cultural, and political change has increased over the years. Globally we are witnessing a consolidation and expansion of the communication used strategically in development organizations (McKee, Bertrand, and Becker-Benton 2004); a very strong activist driven use of communication for the purposes of social mobilization and political transformation (Rodríguez 2001); and more specific media-focused uses of communication advocating social and political change (Downing 2010). While these streams generally typify the field of communication for development and social change today, they seem to have separate niches in the academic literature and in their application. By bringing together these themes, we aim to transcend misleading binaries separating artificial political boundaries of developed from developing, social categories of modern from traditional, communicative approaches of mediated from interpersonal, toward a more comprehensive approach, rarely offered in academic publications. Beyond the inherent value of producing a text that brings together various contributions that reflect these areas, we argue that there is a need for a book that attempts to bridge the apparent divide among these perspectives. Instead of compartmentalizing strategic development interventions without a sense of context, composing critique of development without grounded observation, or considering activist communication solely within the confines of those with access to resources, we propose this text as an integrated framework toward understanding the nature of communication for development and social change, as well as new directions for

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the field. Given recent synergies and processes, media development, social mobilization, and political change have come together in ways that illustrate a growing role for activist communication across the globe. These processes of agency and participation are posing growing challenges to the established paradigms within development communication, inviting us not only to outline established paradigms, but also to chart emerging trends within development communication.

Although there are several valuable published volumes offering overviews of social movements (such as those edited by Downing 2010; Rodríguez, Kidd, and Stein 2009), and of development and social change (Hemer and Tufte 2005; Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006; Wilkins and Enghel 2012), as well as these issues within the broader rubric of global communication (Wilkins, Straubhaar, and Kumar 2013), this book fills a critical niche by offering a comprehensive framework in a growing area of research and action, as social movements and organizations make strategic use of communication technologies and processes in a complex world of dominant global industries and oppressive political regimes. Recognizing a changing global context, this work integrates the interests of many of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) sections, including that of participatory communication, health communication, community communication, communication policy and technology, gender and communication, political communication, and political economy.

Through this handbook we wish to represent and examine this proliferation of approaches to communication, media, development, and social change, providing a general overview of the existing conceptual and practical strands within this field, as well as offering critical analysis and identifying promising directions for future research and intervention. Communication approaches to development and social change engage critical reflections of discourse and praxis, as well as strategic interventions through the work of the development industry, as well as social movement and activist efforts. The organization of this handbook reflects and integrates the diversity of our field, beginning with a critical articulation of the field's history, moving toward a reconceptualization that builds on key development themes; assessing strategic intervention approaches; and recognizing activist engagement toward social and political change.

Conceptually, the breadth of communication for and about development as it is known today ranges from a variety of prescriptive forms of strategic communication, be they persuasive or participatory, to much more open communicative processes, where the strategic aspect focuses on facilitating and catalyzing dialogue, debate and participation, building capacity around, and leading processes that the target audiences drive themselves, be it in social movements, in civil society, in public and/or private organizations, and seeking greater individual and collective agency and engagement. Digital media have created new dynamics of interactivity between people and organizations (and governments); they have created new speeds and forms of circulating information and they have thus stimulated many new ways of social organization, mobilization, participation, and activism.

Contributing authors focus on the comprehensive nature of social problems, rather than limiting work to singular evaluations of projects studied without context. By focusing on particular isolated strategies, these evaluations neglect attention to the critical issue being addressed, such as adequate health care, human rights, or gender equity. In order to resolve social justice problems within their historical and situational contexts, research needs to assess a variety of strategies and contextual conditions over time, in order to consider long-term, sustainable solutions.

This handbook offers thoughtful, critical assessments of key issues in the field. Each section includes an overview chapter by one of the editors, reviewing emerging directions. In Part I, we begin with an introduction to the field in its historical context, including attention to globalization, given the critical parameters of economic structures, political alliances, and transnational social trends, as well as post-development contexts. Critical reflections of the field are pronounced through attention to political economy and advocacy. Carrying this attention to what development itself communicates about the nature of problems and their resolution, we address key themes, including social equity with attention to human rights; public health; multiculturalism and indigenous communities; and natural resources and the environment.

The next two sections of the book examine the strategic work of development institutions (Part II) and of social movements (Part III). In our attempts to understand strategic interventions for development as comprehensive approaches, we include chapters devoted to broad issues such as campaigns, media development, and participatory communication, followed by more specific strategies including commonly practiced development approaches using story telling, entertainment education, theater for development, music, and social entrepreneurship, along with their theoretical frameworks.

Given that a key intention of this volume is to integrate recognition of social movement strategies with development, the third section offers critical attention to social movement strategies using communication and media to promote social and political change. These efforts are similar to those depicted in Part II in that they attempt to use communication for strategic social change, yet they differ in critical ways. In contrast to the institutionally driven programs implemented through the development industry described in the previous group, this section recognizes social movement strategies that are initiated through the work of communities, at times resisting development, while at other times working in parallel or even with little connection to mainstream development practice. These chapters address the organizing and communicative practice of social movements; transnational civil society; social media activism; social accountability; citizens' media and journalism; citizen observatories; community media; youth-generated media; and video activism.

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Part I

Communicating Development and Social Change

1

Development Communication and Social Change in Historical Context

Pradip Ninan Thomas

At any given time, there is a great variety of theoretical and practical approaches in development communications/communications and social change (CSC). Broadly speaking, development communication/communications and social change is about understanding the role played by information, communication, and the media in directed and nondirected social change. It also includes a variety of practical applications based on the mainstreaming of communication as “process” and the leveraging of media technologies in social change. This chapter will specifically deal with development communication/communications for social change from the perspective of communication rights and will include a section on “Voice” making a difference in the context of the “Right to Information” movement in India. In the pedagogy of CSC, we are accustomed to contrasting the “dominant paradigm” and, in particular, its assumptions related to the role of communication in social change along with its preferred methods with that of the participatory school that emerged in the late 1960s, since then becoming global in scope. In its practice, however, it is clear that mixed approaches characterize field applications of CSC and that participation in itself means different things to different people. This has resulted in a variety of participations that can be plotted on the typology that Arnstein created in the late 1960s, ranging from the maximalist to the minimalist.

One of the perennial issues in CSC is whether or not it has an identity that it can call its own and a tradition of theorization that makes it distinctive from other areas in communications. The theorization of CSC has always been dependent on borrowings from other disciplines – from rural sociology that provided the basis for the diffusion model to the radical pedagogy best illustrated by the contributions made by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. CSC theorization has also been

shaped by a great variety of “isms” and schools of thought, including Marxism, feminist theory, post-colonial and subaltern theories, identity theory, globalization, social movement theory, and information and communications technology (ICT) for development theories. In recent times, social networking and urban interventions have also contributed to shaping the practice of CSC, although this is yet to be reflected in its theory. While one can argue that these many borrowings and traditions of interdisciplinarity have contributed to the shaping of CSC as a field and to its dynamism, it is also clear that a consequence of these many influences is the existence of a variety of fault lines – between theory and practice, between technology and the social, policy and the implementation of policy, the global and the local, technocratic and managerial approaches versus endogenous, people-centered approaches. In other words, at any given time, the field is characterized by a variety of disjunctures. In spite of the evidence of quantum, what seems to be the case is that the “practical horse” has bolted leaving the “theoretical cart” behind. In other words these literally thousands of initiatives, learnings, and experiences are yet to become foundational material for an explication of theory reflective of, and conversant with, local realities. It would seem that the advent of the “participatory” model stymied further theoretical innovation given that this was interpreted as the “Holy Grail” that would usher in the promised land characterized by communications for all. Key words such as development, participation, social capital, poverty reduction, civil society and empowerment, among others, have an auratic power that disallows any form of questioning. Issue 4–5 of volume 17 of the journal *Development in Practice* is devoted to a deconstruction of such key words and Andrea Cornwall, in an article entitled “Buzzwords and fuzz-words: Deconstructing development discourse,” makes the following observation:

Development’s buzzwords are not only passwords to funding and influence ... The word *development* itself ... has become a ‘modern shibboleth, an unavoidable password’, which comes to be used ‘to convey the idea that tomorrow things will be better, or that more is necessarily better’ ... the very taken-for-granted quality of ‘development’ leaves much of what is actually *done* in its name unquestioned. (Cornwall 2007: 471)

Enclosures are rather unfortunately a characteristic of this rush to invest words with value and this is best illustrated by the fact that the very phrase “communication for social change” was slated for trademarking by a non-profit organization in the USA. What seems to be missing in this situation is any serious theorizing that is grounded in context and that is conversant with local categories.

This chapter will explore critical issues related to the theorizing of communication and social change. In brief, the history of theory in this area is largely made up of two distinct traditions: (1) the dominant paradigm associated with Everett Rogers, Daniel Lerner, and Wilbur Schramm and (2) the participatory/multiplicity model associated with a number of scholars. A recent account of that history is Emile

McAnany's (2012) *Saving the World: A Brief History of Communication for Development and Social Change*. The dominant paradigm and in particular the tradition associated with Rogers – the diffusion of innovations – has been critiqued for its top-down nature although arguably this model remains global. The dominant paradigm is also associated with a strongly “behaviorist” emphasis at the expense of “structures” and this focus on change at the level of the individual remains persistent and paramount. While the participatory model and its emphasis on communication as process does have its merits; in reality there are different traditions of participation, some that are more inclusive than others. Terms such as the role of communications in empowerment, access to communication, and participation as process were articulated by proponents of this model. Rather than deal with the history of theorizing in this area, it will deal with contemporary deficits in the theorizing of CSC and explore three possible avenues for the reinvigoration of CSC theory: (1) the possibilities for understanding conceptual categories such as participation in and through digital interventions such as the Free and Open Source movement and digital labor, (2) attempts to understand CSC theory through the lens provided by communication rights movements (the example of the Right to Information movement in India is given in order to explore validation of local processes of participation and Voice through the mechanism of Public Hearings), and (3) the need for CSC theory to converse with Actor Network Theory linked to a critical political economy of communications toward an understanding of the role played by power/knowledge in the creation and maintenance of networks of power involved in CSC policymaking.

The Commodifications of Participation

An obvious starting place to explore these dislocations is to begin with the multi-accentual nature of concepts such as participation, access, and Voice that is contextually defined and that offers many meanings to many people and many opportunities for practice. Even within civil society interventions related to CSC, these concepts are routinely invoked by different organizations – from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and UNICEF to the World Bank, and organizations such as AMARC, APC, and WACC. Participation is influenced by political economy and by different visions of utopia, of orderings of the world. A critical, political economy inspired approach offers the means to explore communications and social change in terms of its shapings by structures, ideologies, and power flows. The Slovenian social philosopher Slavoj Žižek in his book *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce*, in a critique of capitalism and a call to the “left” to reinvent itself, includes an interesting critique of the embrace of “cultural capitalism” that also offers the possibility for a redemption through consumption. He uses the example of a Starbucks coffee advertisement that sells a “coffee ethic” through linking consumption of

coffee to Fair Trade, ethical investment, and the enjoyment of good “coffee karma”, thereby enhancing our enjoyment of feel-good consumptive practices. As he points out:

The “cultural” surplus is ... spelled out: the price is higher than elsewhere since what you are really buying is the “coffee ethic” which includes care for the environment, social responsibility towards the producers, plus a place where you yourself can participate in communal life ... (Žižek 2009: 53–54)

The upshot of our involvement in such circuits of cultural consumption is that we end up contributing to initiatives that are destined to forever deal with the symptoms of poverty but never with its causes, which include unjust trade practices, poverty and exploitation, the issue of land, and so on. Participation in this utopia is limited precisely because it does not give either the producer or consumer the opportunity to take part in an exercise of freedom. It is very similar to the “slacktivist” cultures that are rife in the era of social networking. This is a culture that encourages people to click and contribute to online polls and issues but that does not enable an engagement with real issues in the world of the here and now. NGOs, for the most part, tend to replicate the logic of neoliberalism and participation therefore tends to become the means for extending the project of neoliberalism through enabling people to participate in a variety of forms of “compassionate capitalism.”

This evisceration of meaning has undoubtedly enabled the worldwide diffusion of the concept of participation. Its status as a weasel word has enabled its mainstreaming, given that it can be invested with meaning in context. More often than not this process of divesting and investing in meanings has led to participation becoming an “empty signifier,” the basis for donor–recipient relationships in the funding of aid and in the writing of reports but not as an essential ethic, skill, and process related to building up capacities in local populations. So, one can argue that participation really has become critical to the reinvention of the dominant paradigm in the context of the twenty-first-century development industry. The argument here is that the field has moved away from the Freirean understanding of participation as praxis, as the means for empowerment and the basis for engagements with reality in order to change it. Instead, participation today is invoked by all sections although rarely as the basis for transformative change. Students from the Centre for Communication and Social Change, UQ, Brisbane, have consistently reported after carrying out fieldwork in countries including Nigeria, Vietnam, and Indonesia that participation remains elusive, a mystery to most people although it exists as a buzzword in the background, invoked by everyone involved in development although practiced by none. While extensive projects find it difficult to mainstream “participation,” it is more likely that participation does work in the context of small-scale projects. This is borne out in a 2012 global survey of participation of community radio stations carried out by

the Aachen-based organization CAMECO. On the nature and levels of participation, the evidence suggests regional differences: there are bound to be community radio stations in every region of the world that exhibit a maximalist approach to participation.

Whereas the ranking of the different areas of participation is similar in all regions, big differences exist in their importance: Latin America tops participation in programming (90%), but is far below average in management and ownership. In Africa, the level of participation in financing (54%) and ownership (49%) is relatively high; participation in ownership is more common in anglophone countries. In Asia, participation in management plays a crucial role (69%). ... The number of radio stations where community members play a greater role in production, presentation or journalism is still rather high: Community members function as local reporters (69%), work as presenters (63%), are responsible for special programmes/time slots (61%), and are musicians (61%), citizen reporters (56%) or editors/producers (39%). The number of radio stations where community members bear a higher responsibility for programme contents, i.e., as editors, producers or presenters, is generally higher in Asia ... than in Africa or Latin America. (Frolich *et al.* 2012: 8–9)

The Cooption and Redemption of Participation in a Digital Era

While these types of assessments of participation do have their limitations, given that they do not generate information on the granular nature of participation or its micropolitics, they have value as a snapshot of participation in the global community radio movement. For CSC theorists, however, one can argue that it is equally profitable to explore participation online, given that it reflects a range of participations – from the corporate control and commodification of participation via myriad versions of “interactivity” to real possibilities for an exploration of alternatives. Henry Jenkins’s “Convergence Culture” that celebrates prosumerism and online freedoms has attracted criticism from media scholars on the left of the academic spectrum including Christian Fuchs, Mark Andrejevic, Graham Murdock, and others. Mark Andrejevic makes the point that interactivity is located within “digital enclosures” and is the perfect means for both the state and private companies for the surveillance of users for security reasons and from a market perspective:

There is a price to be paid for convenience and customization – and we will likely end up paying it not just by sacrificing privacy, but by engaging in the work of being watched: participating in the creation of demographic information to be traded by commercial entities for commercial gain and subcontracted forms of policing and surveillance. (Andrejevic 2007: 98)

In a related piece on the “affective economics” of interactivity, Andrejevic (2011: 616–617) makes the point that at the end of the day audience identification with brands, in spite of the hype of interactivity, are attempts at control and not empowerment. “A context in which control relies increasingly upon expanded opportunities for participation requires a rethinking of the oppositions that place participation per se on the side of democratic empowerment” for there is a need to recognize the “role played by participation in the modulation of affect as a modality of control.” Nicholas Carah (2010) in his book *Pop Brands* shows how mobile phone-based interactivity with bands in the context of music festivals in Australia facilitates branding through “immaterial labour.”

However this very same terrain of the digital has also become the space for innumerable, collaborative projects involving participation. One of the intriguing aspects of information as a commodity is that it cannot, by its very nature, be completely commodified, unlike the vast majority of physical goods. As an immaterial good and service, its status as property remains elusive and is difficult to map onto the existing system of intellectual property. While not denying the fact that information as a commodity and as flows generates massive amounts of global capital, the disruptive potential of the digital continues to unsettle both governments and corporates. The worldwide free and open-source software (FOSS) movement offers compelling evidence of shifts in the production of value. As Daniel Ross (2011: 145) succinctly puts it, “What we find when we are considering FOSS is that it is in fact a highly conflicted entity within the capitalist apparatus of accumulation: simultaneously capable of being commodified, yet acting as reactant of decommmodification: consuming commodified wage labor, yet existing as the product of volunteerism.” This ambivalent nature of information, in particular, its differential valuations at the moment of exchange, reflects as Murdock has suggested, the beginnings of an emerging “gift economy,” and, as such, is indicative of the deep fault lines that run within the core of the contemporary informational mode of production. Projects such as Wikipedia and the worldwide success of FOSS as a movement suggest that the meaning of participation can be redeemed online via cooperative endeavors that involve collaboration, sharing, and volunteerism, which has also been described as a case of “digital gifting.” Murdock, in an essay that argues the case for moral economies supportive of “public cultural commons,” describes digital gifting as follows:

Digital gifting outside the price system operates at three basic levels. Firstly, there is sharing where individuals circulate self-produced or found material using their own website or web space. ... At the next stage up there is co-operation, where individuals contribute to making a shared domain more useful. ... Finally, there is collaborative activity designed to create a new cultural product or resource that can be freely shared. (2011: 25)

I would argue that the study of labor in the context of FOSS and other online projects offers textured possibilities to understand participation in the context of

contemporary social change. We need to, however, locate our understanding within the possibilities of capital given that none of these processes is outside of the system, although they certainly hint at subversions of that system. I would also argue that traditional approaches to understanding participation, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) are dead-ends precisely because innumerable studies have shown the limits of participation. We know what the obstacles are, what the issues are – but we tend to replicate such studies and they confirm what we already know of the limits of participation. To a large extent the mainstreaming of extensive behavioral change communication initiatives has led to the globalization of formulas and to the inevitable contraction of innovation and creativity. The compartmentalization of behavioral change and social change by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), as per the following description, exemplifies this approach to communication and social change in which a focus on discrete variables enables individuals to be abstracted from the system and collective attributes to be abstracted from individuals. The result is a schizophrenic approach in which behavioral change and social change are unrelated and managed separately.

Behaviour change is commonly defined as a research-based consultative process for addressing knowledge, attitudes and practices that are intrinsically linked to programme goals. Its vision includes providing participants with relevant information and motivation through well-defined strategies, using an audience-appropriate mix of interpersonal, group and mass-media channels and participatory methods. Behaviour change strategies tend to focus on the individual as a locus of change. (UNICEF, 2012)

Social change, on the other hand, is understood as a process of transformation in the way society is organised, within institutions, and in the distribution of power within various social and political institutions. For behaviours to change on a large scale, certain harmful cultural practices, societal norms and structural inequalities have to be taken into consideration. Social change approaches, thus, tend to focus on the community as the unit of change. (UNICEF, 2012)

The Contributions of Communication Rights Movements to CSC Theory: The Right to Information Movement in India and Voice

I also believe that CSC theory, and in particular its conceptual core consisting of concepts such as participation, access, empowerment and voice, can become reinvigorated through new meanings from the study and analysis of communication rights movements, particularly those that have evolved in response to specific deficits at local levels. Let me share one example of indigenous categories and

processes that were a central aspect of an approach to communication and social change. The movement is the Right to Information (RTI) movement in India, which is widely recognized as the most significant movement since the nationalist movement that led to India's independence. This was a movement I had studied in 2010 and which was then published as one of five case studies in the book *Negotiating Communication Rights: Case Studies from India* (Thomas, 2011). The background to this movement is the reality of corruption and graft on a gargantuan scale and its impact on the lives of ordinary Indians. India's welfare economy reaches out into the lives of millions of people. Billions of dollars are spent annually on a range of entitlements – from employment, education, health care, and subsidized food – although only a small proportion of actual funds are actually spent on development. The RTI movement began in a small village in the state of Rajasthan, western India, in the 1990s and ultimately became the basis for a nationwide movement that resulted in numerous legislations at federal and state levels. While this movement is by no means “complete,” is “in process,” and faces multiple obstacles, it has contributed to the revitalization of democracy and the validation of the contributions of ordinary people to the shaping of democratic futures.

The strength of this movement is that it has transformed tried and tested local forms of participation into a nationwide ethic and in that process validated the low-cost and the everyday, cooperative styles and local communicative practices. As opposed to formulaic, top-down participation, movements like the RTI have made participation as a skill, ethic, and process the very basis for people's empowerment. It can be argued that local cultural forms and activities are typically relational and it is this accent on process that facilitates individual buy-in into a movement. Klandermans and Oegema (1987: 519) refer to the processes involved in individual participation in movements:

At the individual level, becoming a participant in a social movement can be conceived as a process with four different steps: becoming part of the mobilization potential, becoming target of mobilization attempts, becoming motivated to participate, and overcoming barriers to participate. The first two steps are necessary conditions for the arousal of motivation. Motivation and barriers interact to bring about participation: the more motivated people are the higher the barriers they can overcome.

Public Hearings, Participation, Voice

The strength of the Right to Information movement in India includes the following. It is an indigenous social movement that was a response to felt needs. It started as a grass-roots movement supported entirely by voluntary, local contributions and it employed familiar pedagogical tools like the Jan Sunwai (public hearing) that was used to strengthen and valorize Voice and offer frameworks for participation. This