

Theorizing Communication: A Model from Hinduism

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This article presents an account of contemporary endeavors in the field of communication/media studies in Nepal. It first examines the inherently problematic position of communication discipline in Nepal, and uncovers that Westernization-as-Globalization had been the dominant paradigm for the discipline. Then, it outlines the emerging practices of exploring native perspectives on communication. It argues of substantive progress in the case of communication studies in Nepal, where a unique communication model has been developed and presented from Hindu perspective. It also assesses media ethics as another area for such academic exploration.¹

Communication, as a discipline of knowledge or as an academic field of study, has remained inherently problematic in many non-Western countries – Asians and Africans alike; Nepal being no exception. On the one hand, these countries indigenously inherit the concept of communication, and have been practicing it since time-immemorial. On the other, communication-as-modern-discipline-of-knowledge is borrowed from the West.

"No civilization is possible," as Dissanayake (2003) observes, "without a vigorous system of communication" (p. 18). It implies that there must exist communication practice and theory in every living society. Thus a communication tradition, rich and refined both in theory and practice, should have been an inseparable part of Nepali culture as she is inheritor of culturally rich civilization (Adhikary, 2003, January 13). In this light, communication is to be considered indigenous – both as practice and concept.

¹ This article is primarily based on a paper that I presented at the first Media Research Conference 2010 in Kathmandu (Adhikary, 2010b).

But, as a discipline of knowledge or as an academic field of study, communication first gained recognition and evolved in the West, particularly in the United States of America in the twentieth century AD (Beck, Bennett, and Wall, 2004, p. 35; Dissanayake, 1988b, p. 3; IGNOU 2005, p. 23). Particularly, the study of 'communication theory' has been traditionally Eurocentric (Miike, 2007a, p. 1) – "generated by Westerners for the West" (Chen and Miike, 2006, p. 1). As Gordon (2007) puts it, "Human Communication Theory: Made in the U.S.A." (p. 51).

The non-Western countries had three options while they were developing curricula of communication and/or allied disciplines. First, they could have drawn on native perspectives thereby primarily incorporating indigenous concepts, if not theories and models, of communication. Second, it was much easier for them to adopt solely the Western discursive paradigm. Third, they could have adopted comparative approach thus incorporating both indigenous and Western contents, and facilitating 'indigenization'.² Of these, the adoption of the Western paradigm has been the general practice (Adhikary, 2009d, p. 296), "without any rational analysis" (Adhikary, 2008a, p. 61), as it suits the project of globalization, which legitimizes unidirectional gateway for flow of information (Adhikary, 2007e).

As Dissanayake (1988b) observes, "attention has been confined to communication meta-theory associated with industrially advanced Western countries" (p. 1). According to Miike (2008), "Many researchers, Asian and non-Asian alike, in the field have assumed the universal applicability of the meta-theory and methodology of Eurocentric communication scholarship" (p. 57). Miike (2007a) observes,

² According to Gudykunst (2005, p. 85), whereas indigenous theories are native, rooted in specific cultures, and emphasize the human experience in specific cultures; indigenization refers to processes of transforming U.S. theories so that they are appropriate in other cultures.

By and large, Asian communication professionals are more versed in Western intellectual trajectories than Asian traditions of thought. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that there have been not many theoretical investigations that drew out communicative ideas and insights from Asian classical literature. (p. 2)

In this background, it is no wonder that communication, as an academic field of study, lacked indigenous insights, and hence, it was treated as an exogenous entity 'imported' from the West into non-Western countries.

But, the communication discipline has been changing as the Western discursive paradigm is being challenged, if not completely replaced, by alternative paradigms. "Such attempts are rooted in cultural identity consciousness" (Adhikary, 2008b, p. 272). In other words, "Eurocentric scholarship" and "its one-sidedly presumed universality and totalizing tendency" (Miike, 2007a, p. 1) does not seem prolonging. Consequently, the idea of universal meta-theory/meta-model of communication has been firmly rejected, and the sphere of communication theory has been broadened in order to incorporate non-Western contributions as well. Due to such paradigm shift, "the multicultural turn in communication theory" (Miike, 2007b, p. 272) has already taken place.

Accordingly, as Dissanayake (2009) observes "a great upsurge of interests in the study and research in Asian theories of communication" (p. 7) has been witnessed in last few decades. Two books (Dissanayake, 1988; Kincaid, 1987) are considered as seminal works in this regard. The published works in the field are increasing (the list of such works can be seen in: Adhikary, 2009b; Miike, 2009a; Miike and Chen, 2003, 2006; Xiaoge, 2000). Theorizing communication from Asian perspectives is advancing in such an extent that even the *Asiacentric School* of communication

theories is said to be emerging and developing, and becoming increasingly significant (Edmondson, 2009, p. 104).

In case of Nepal, the study of communication in general, and communication theory in particular, had not been the study of communication from the native perspectives. Even a cursory look on the curricula of Tribhuvan University (TU) and Purvanchal University (PU) is enough to observe that any indigenous concept/theory/model of communication is not incorporated there. The pattern is visible not only in case of communication theory, but in other areas of study too. For instance, a research on the state of media ethics studies in Nepal revealed that the courses offered in media ethics by TU and PU completely lacked indigenous insights (Adhikary, 2008c), even though Nepal is inheritor of rich Hindu and Buddhist ethical traditions.

The issue should be viewed in a larger context. A general predisposition of considering 'Americanization'/'Westernization' as globalization (Dahal, 2005, p. 57) is not new thing for Nepal. And, "'West is the best' psyche" (Bhattachan, 2005, p. 89) is something that can be easily perceived. In this light, the acceptance of Western discursive paradigm and the rejection or apathy to native perspectives in the curricula implies that Westernization-as-Globalization had been the dominant paradigm for the discipline of communication in Nepal. However, it is to mention that Kathmandu University (KU) has already started incorporating indigenous concept/theory/model of communication in the curriculum of Bachelor in Media Studies (BMS) (also see: Adhikary, 2010c).

Theorizing Communication from Hindu Perspective and the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC)

Hindu society represents old civilization with a known history of thousands of years and having a distinct cultural identity of its own. It is the inheritor of culturally rich civilization rooted to Vedic

period. Communication (*sanchar*) is not new concept for Hindu society. Likewise, communication theorization is also not alien endeavour here. Rather, both communication and theorizing communication are indigenous for ancient *Bharatavarsha*. There are many traditional Hindu concepts, theories and methods, which can be unearthed to garner their contemporary relevance and significance.

Many authors seem to be occupied with the misconception of considering *theory* as "a product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment of Europe, the foundations of which can be traced to European classical philosophies" (see: Wong, Manvi, and Wong, 1995, qtd. in Miike, 2006, p. 21), and for this reason, a Western notion. But, theorization, and theory itself, are very common in Hindu philosophical systems. Hindu philosophies "subscribe to the view of the unity of theory and practice" (Balasubramanian, 1990, p. 16). In other words, Hindu thinkers have been "constantly engaged in theorizing about practice" (Mohanty, 2001, p. 25), and hence theory can be approached in an entirely indigenous fashion.

The modern history of studying communication practices in Hindu society goes back to at least five decades ago (Majumdar, 1958). However, it was only in the early 1980s and thereafter that scholars emphasized on theorizing communication from Hindu perspective (Dissanayake, 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1988b, 1988c; Saral, 1983; Tewari, 1980; Yadava, 1982, 1987). Tewari (1980, 1992) and Yadava (1987, 1998) argued that *sadharanikaran* is the concept which, in Hindu context, refers to what is meant by the Latin word 'communis' and its modern English version 'communication' (also see: Adhikary, 2009b, p. 70). In the course of time, *sadharanikaran* has gained prominence as a theory of communication. It has become customary to mention *sadharanikaran* as Hindu/Indian theory of communication, and, numerous academic institutions in India have already incorporated it in their curricula.

In Nepal, my own works (Adhikary, 2003a; Ayod-Dhaumya, 2003a, 2003b) happen to be the earliest initiatives in the study of communication from Hindu perspective. Subsequently, as the outcome of M.A. Thesis, a unique communication model (i.e., *sadharanikaran* model of communication – SMC) was developed and presented (Adhikary, 2003c, p. 84).

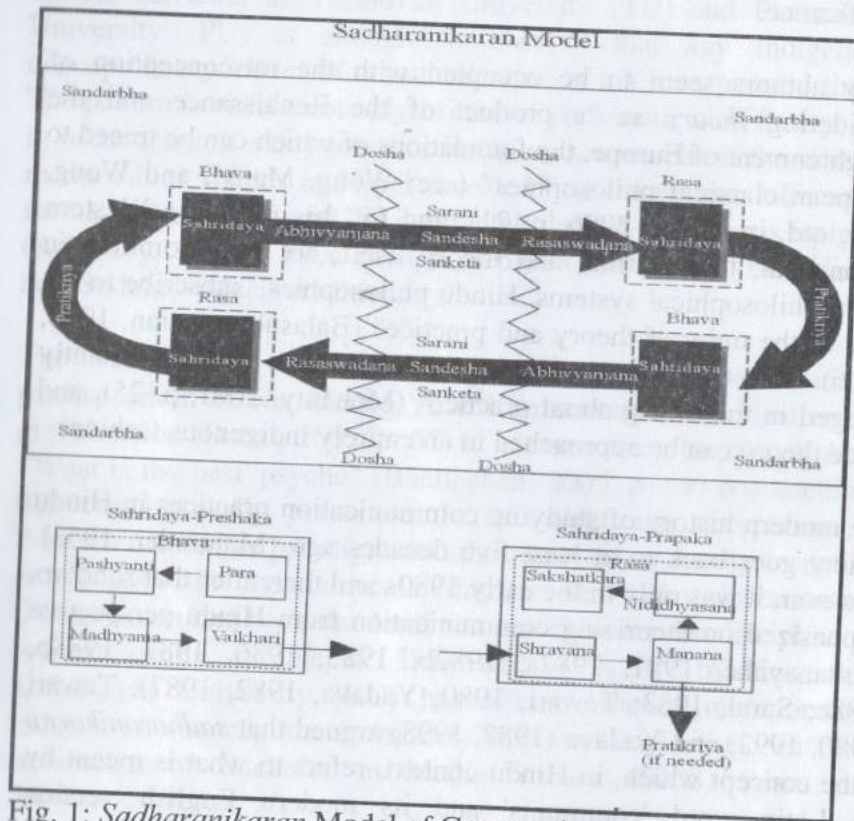


Fig. 1: *Sadharanikaran* Model of Communication I

The cumulative studies (Adhikary, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b) and various programs not only continued the discourse, but also provided me opportunities to get feedbacks from various scholars. Based on these, the SMC has been revised and improved. This paper presents both figures of the

model. As mentioned above, the first figure came into existence in 2003 (Adhikary, 2003c), and the second one was presented in early 2010 (Adhikary, 2010a, 2010b; also see: Adhikary, 2010d, 2010e, 2010f) in progression to the former.

Thus, there have been 'formulations' of the SMC. Moreover, there is scope for further revisions, improvements and adjustments in the model. As my own understanding of Hinduism advances and/or if other scholars come up with genuine remarks, I am open to accept that. After all, theories and hence models of communication should be heuristic.

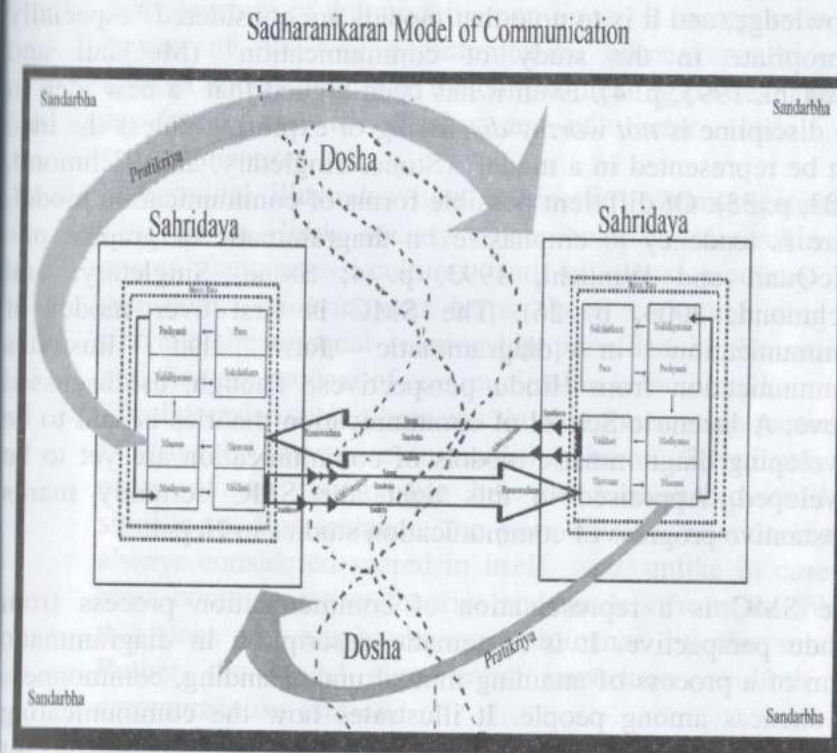


Fig. 2: *Sadharanikaran* Model of Communication II

The SMC has been considered landmark in theorizing communication (for instance: Acharya, 2011; Annapurna Shiksha 2010; Jha, 2010a, 2010b; Khanal, 2008, pp. 21-22; Pant, 2009a, pp. 84-86, 2009b, p. 4, 2010, pp. 85-89). The model, Khanal (2008) says, gives new dimension to study on communication from Hindu perspective (p. 21). Pant (2009, November 24) says, "The exploration of such a model based on the Eastern perspective will undoubtedly contribute to the development of new communication theories" (p.4).

Presenting a model is considered significant in any discipline of knowledge, and it is to note that models are considered "especially appropriate in the study of communication" (McQuail and Windahl, 1993, p. 4). Even it has been argued that "a new idea in the discipline is *not worthy discussing* or exploring unless the idea can be represented in a model" (Stone, Singletary, and Richmond 2003, p. 33). Of different possible forms of communication model there is tendency to emphasize on diagrammatic or graphic one (McQuail and Windahl, 1993, p. 4; Stone, Singletary, and Richmond, 2003, p. 26). The SMC is first ever model of communication in diagrammatic form that illustrates communication from Hindu perspectives. Though, as discussed above, Asiatic School of communication theories is said to be developing diagrammatic models of communication are yet to be developed. Appraised in this light, the SMC certainly marks substantive progress of communication studies in Nepal.

The SMC is a representation of communication process from Hindu perspective. It is systematic description in diagrammatic form of a process of attaining mutual understanding, commonness or oneness among people. It illustrates how the communicating parties interact in a system (i.e., the process of *sadharanikaran*) for the attainment *sahridayata*. *Sahridayata* is the core concept upon which the meaning of *sadharanikaran* resides. It is the state of common orientation, commonality, mutual understanding or oneness. Communicating parties become *sahridayas* with the

completion of the process of *sadharanikaran* (For further discussion on *sahridayata*, see: Adhikary, 2010g; Misra, 2008; also see: Adhikary, 2003c, 2004, 2007a, 2007c, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b, 2010e, 2010f). In this light, the SMC envisions communication for communion (see: Adhikary, FORTHCOMING).

Here, due to limitations of this paper, it is not possible to describe the SMC in detail (for detailed discussion, see: Adhikary, 2009b). Following discussion just outlines its fundamentals.

1. The structure of the model is non-linear. It incorporates the notion of two-way communication process resulting in mutual understanding of the communicating parties. Thus it is free from the limitations of linear models of communication.
2. The model illustrates how successful communication is possible in Hindu society where complex hierarchies of castes, languages, cultures and religious practices are prevalent. *Sahridayata* helps those communicating to pervade the unequal relationship prevailed in the society and the very process of communication is facilitated.
3. The interrelationship between the communicating parties is of crucial importance in *sadharanikaran*. Here, not the cause of the relationship but the relationship itself is significant. For instance, the *guru-shishya* relationship is always considered sacred in itself. And, unlike in case of most communication theories and models from the West, this does not emphasize on dominance by the sender. Rather, the model gives equal importance to both the communicating parties.
4. The model shows that *abhivyanjana* (encoding) and *rasaswadana* (decoding) are the fundamental activities in communication. In other words, they are decisive junctures in *sadharanikaran* (communication).

5. It shows that Hindu perspective on communication emphasizes more on internal or intrapersonal activity. For instance, both the processes of encoding and decoding consist of four-layer mechanism in its ideal form. Communication involves more experience within than objective rationality of the sensory organs.

6. With the provision of *sandarbha* (context), the model clarifies how meaning could be provided to the message even if the sender is not identified to the receiver. The intended meaning of any message can be ascertained due to the context, without determining the actual intention in the mind of the speaker just by taking contextual factors into account. Thus due to the context a text can retain its 'objective' meaning.

7. The scope of communication from Hindu perspective is broad. As envisioned in the model, communication is broader enough to deal with all of the three dimensions of life: *adhibhautika* (physical or mundane), *adhidaivika* (mental) and *adhyatmika* (spiritual). In social or worldly context, communication is such process by which, in ideal conditions, humans achieve *sahridayata*. In mental context, communication is the process of gaining true knowledge as well as similar mutual experience. But that is not the whole story; it has spiritual dimension too.

8. The goal of communication as envisioned in the model is certainly achieving commonness or mutual understanding. But, the goal would not be limited to just this extent. Just as Hinduism always emphasizes to achieve all of the *purushartha chatustayas* (i.e., four goals of life: *artha*, *kama*, *dharma* and *moksha*), the model also conceives communication capable of attaining all these goals. Thus the model is in perfect consonance with Hindu World View.

Bharata's *Natyashastra* and Bhartrihari's *Vakyapadiya* are two principle sources for the model. Most of the concepts drawn on (for e.g., *sadharanikaran*, *sahridayata*, *rasaswadana*, *sakshatkara*, etc.

are formal concepts that are firmly established on Sanskrit poetics, aesthetics and linguistics as well as other disciplines of Hindu religious-philosophical knowledge systems. These concepts are the foundations on which the SMC is established.

Sadharanikaran as a concept/theory should not be confused with the *sadharanikaran* model of communication (SMC). The former, which is one of the significant theories in Sanskrit poetics and other disciplines, has its root in Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra* and is identified with Bhattanayaka. Whereas, the SMC refers to a model of communication, which draws on the classical concept/theory of *sadharanikaran* along with other resources in order to visualize Hindu perspectives on communication, was first developed and proposed in 2003 (Adhikary, 2003c).

Hindu way of communicating certainly emphasizes on internal or intrapersonal activity. It is comprehensible that *abhivyanjana* and *rasaswadana* are the fundamental activities in communication, and in Hindu life communication involves more experience within than objective rationality of the sensory organs. This tendency facilitates *sahridayata* and other concepts to be materialized practically. Thus, communication results in communion in Hindu society.

By virtue of *sahridayata* envisioned, the *sadharanikaran* theory and the SMC have scope to be generalized as a "grand theory" (see: Chen and Miike, 2006, p. 5). The SMC's root being in Hindu culture does not limit its scope for universalization of the model. "Communication theorizing in the local community and the global society ought to move beyond the dualistic thinking of provincial specificity versus universal applicability. Any theory has local resonance and may have global significance" (Miike, 2007b, p. 277). And, "Cultural particularity leads to human universality. We do not need to walk away from cultural particularity to reach human universality" (Chen and Miike, 2006, p. 4). What is to be avoided is the ethnocentricity and supremacist fundamentalism. Ranganathananda (1971) rightly says, "Without proper

understanding of our own culture, we shall never be able to enter the soul of another culture, nor profit from it" (p. 56). From a panhuman vantage point, the utility of such a model of communication is enormous.

I have sought to test the SMC in real life situations, such as the teacher-student communication in the classroom (see: Adhikary, 2010g). My interest on the teacher-student communication in the classroom is geared by the belief that it is the site and situation where prevails asymmetrical relationship between the communicating parties (the teacher and the student) but with the experience of *sahridayata*. It is so, at least, in the cultural contexts of Nepal and India. Thus, such site and situation could be studied as a simulation for understanding how *sahridayata* can be achieved between/among communicating parties even in asymmetrical relations.

In the case of conceptual research, I assert that the identification of communication (*sanchar*) as a means for *moksha*-in-life and thus proving it *yoga* (i.e., '*sancharyoga*') is significant achievement (Adhikary, 2007d, 2010e, 2010f). It will have considerable implications for interdisciplinary studies of communication and philosophy. In a paper (Adhikary, 2010e), I have discussed how the discipline of communication can be approached as a *vidya* (true knowledge) in Hindu orthodoxy.

The SMC is not the only possible model of communication from Hindu perspective; rather, there is scope for developing other communication models. With vast diversities of philosophies within Hinduism, it is just one of many models that could be developed. Many theories and models of communication would come out if communication discipline has enthusiasm of encountering different Hindu philosophical traditions.

The scope of a Hindu model of communication, such as the SMC, in promoting peace and conflict resolution should be appropriately understood and employed (Adhikary, 2010a). Furthermore, there is

scope for generalizing the concept and the construct of *sahridayata* in the broader study of Hindu philosophy (Adhikary, 2010h, 2011).

Positing Media Ethics Paradigm from Hindu Perspective

The Eurocentric scholarship's dominance is prevalent in the field of media ethics studies too. However, cultural identity consciousness is something that cannot be ignored in this regard. In other words, the ethical considerations must be judged on the touchstone of concerning society and its social cultural inheritance. "A society that ignores its own ethical ideal does it as its own peril" (Babbili, 2001, p. 163; also see: Babbili, 2008). On the other hand, "Understanding one's own ethical texts and one's own ethical underpinnings will establish a foundation through which communication problems can be explored and solutions can be delivered" (ibid., p. 173).

There is need of and scope for indigenous studies on media ethics. "Since mass media professionals and their community are inextricably bound together the ethical questions of particular professional communicator must be judged against the social cultural background of the society for which the medium is aiming to work" (Adhikary, 2007g, p. 24). This calls for attention of media academia, educators, students and professionals to explore native perspectives on media ethics, at least theoretically in the beginning.

The studies done so far (Adhikary, 2003b, 2006, 2007f, 2007g, 2008c, 2009c) are preliminary works for positing media ethics paradigm from Hindu perspective. Hinduism bears a vast resource for studies on ethics by virtue of rich heritage of philosophy and culture (Adhikary, 2006, 2007f). Of enormous possible resources, only Mimamsa philosophy (Adhikary, 2007g) and *Manusmriti* (2009c) have been particularly drawn on. Meanwhile, Hindu texts are not the only resources in this regard; rather other philosophical, religious and/or cultural systems including Buddhism also inherit same sort of scope.

Thus, as compared to theorization of communication, the project of positing media ethics paradigm from Hindu perspective is just in exploratory phase. It is yet to develop any ethical model particularly for mass media (i.e., code of conduct) that is indigenous – of Nepali/Hindu origin. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary research on media ethics and Hinduism could enrich the media studies discipline significantly.

Concluding Remarks

Communication scholars have apparently shown their vitality in multicultural turn of communication discipline and in this regard the role of non-Western in general, and Asian communication scholars, in particular, is crucial (Dissanayake, 1981, 1986, 1988b, 2003, 2009; Gordon, 2007; Miike, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2008, 2010). More particularly, insights from Hindu knowledge system(s) can give what Maxmuller (1951) terms "new light and new life" (p. 38) to the communication discipline.

Though Westernization-as-Globalization perspective is still dominant for the discipline of communication in Nepal, the emerging practices signify an ongoing paradigm shift. Of Nepali universities, KU has already taken a step forward by incorporating communication theories of Bharata Muni and Bhartrihari, and also *sadharanikaran* model of communication (SMC) in the BMS curriculum. It is to see whether and when TU and PU will be free of West-centric paradigm and welcome and promote indigenous communication scholarship.

With the development of a unique communication model from Hindu perspective (i.e., *sadharanikaran* model of communication) Nepal has witnessed a substantive achievement for communication studies in general and indigenous theorization of communication in particular. Media ethics is another area of study bearing a vast scope for academic explorations from Hindu perspective.

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Political Communication: Its Scope and Importance

- Bhuwan KC

The significance of political communication has increased globally in recent times. In modern politics, the success or failure depends, to a large degree, on the ability of the political institutions to communicate to the public. Election campaigns are but one obvious example for the crucial role of political communication.³

The government agencies, political parties, civil society, and organizations have understood the importance of political communication and have adopted, in varying extent, means of communication to make the exchange of political ideas. However, effective political communication is not an easy task. Right channel and honest content at the appropriate period of time is crucial for the success. Linguistic sophistication, educational standard, economic status, cultural finesse, and racial sensitivity also play a crucial role in the success of the political communication.

Introduction

Political communication is a transmission of political information to the audience with whom the communicator wants to build a better relationship.

The process of political communication operates down-wards from governing institutions towards citizens, horizontally in linkages among political actors, and also upwards from public opinion towards authorities.⁴

Political communication deals with the production, dissemination, procession and effects of information about different political aspects and it often influences political decisions.

Political communication, which is primarily related to the field of political science, intersects with the contemporary means of

³ <http://ics.leeds.ac.uk/sub1.cfm?pbcrumb=mapc>, 16 June, 2010.

⁴ <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713774515>, June 6, 2010.