WG 4 – AUDIENCE TRANSFORMATIONS AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

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Audience research in Israel

Communication research in Israel, including audience research, emerged during nation-building processes beginning about half a century ago, as a result of both the development of high education and new media organizations – especially Israeli radio and television. Since that time, audience research had grown and undergone several changes as both high education and media organizations have undergone rapid expansion as well as increasing privatization and commercialization.

In 1964, Elihu Katz, a young American immigrant to Israel and a former student and collaborator of Paul Lazarsfeld was appointed as head of a committee to propose a framework for teaching and research of communication and eventually, in 1966, he established the Institute of Communication (CI) at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HUJ) and become its Head (Livingstone, 1997). The CI was established according to Katz's conception of the empirical research paradigm, which was rooted in Lazarsfeld's vision. Hence, for at least twenty years the audience research in Israel was dominated by positivistic approach, which utilized surveys as a primary method for understanding social processes and the uses of different media in various audiences.

Katz sought to integrate academic and applied studies of communication, and in particular audience research, that were relevant to journalists, policymakers, and academic researchers (Adoni & First, 2006). This direction was further enhanced by the CI's early formation of close, enduring ties with the Institute for Applied Social Research (IASR) headed by Louis Guttman. This independent, non-profit institute, located outside the HUJ campuses, was actively involved in administrative research and performed audience research for various governmental and public bodies since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Collaboration between the two institutes began in the period leading up to the 1967 Six Day War and generated administrative studies of the highest quality on varied subjects (Gratch, 1973). These studies included: research on citizen requests to different bureaucratic agencies such as the ministries of immigration and absorption, health, and education (1966-69); a large research project on public opinion in anticipation of the launching of Israeli television (1967); the first ever comprehensive research project of diverse populations' media consumption and of

cultural events in Israel 1970 (Katz & Gurevitch, 1976), including seminal "Uses and Gratifications" study (Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973), and the repetition of the same project twenty years later in 1990 (Adoni, 1995; Katz et al., 2000); a "Yom Kippur War Study" on attitudes and patterns of media use in war situations (1973-74); and an especially ambitious, ongoing survey project measuring changes in both public opinion and patterns of media consumption (Gratch, 1973).

Katz's role as a founding father of the communication field in Israel enabled him to complete the process of transferring the functionalist-positivist approach from Chicago and Columbia and consolidating its theoretical hegemony in Jerusalem while tutoring a whole generation of young academics in empirical research of media audiences. The HUJ was founded as part of nation-building efforts even before the State of Israel's establishment in 1948 (Katz & Hed, 1997). Zionist ideology influenced the development of the social sciences in general (Ram, 1993) and of communication research in particular, regarding both the choice of topics investigated as well as the emphasis on applied social research. The subjects researched by the CI and the IASR varied according to the funding provided by the IDF (Israel Defense Forces), the Office of the Prime Minister, and government agencies, while conducting ongoing surveys of radio listening and television viewing for the IBA (Israel Broadcasting Authority). This resembled developments in the United States during World War II and the decade following it, when communication research was promoted largely via national projects, particularly military studies on both world wars and their consequences.

The symbiotic relations between the CI and the ISAR were seen by all parties as necessary given the recurrent national emergency mobilizations in the face of wars and their aftermath. These relations between the two institutes constituted the melting pot in which the functionalist approach and the empiricist methodology crystallized as the dominant orientation for social and communication research. Research mobilization for the Zionist project on the one hand, and scientific hegemony on the other, limited the researchers' openness to other scientific approaches and research methodologies, and as a result their work lacked a critical perspective. This situation may have contributed to the delay in the development of critical approaches to communication research such as the feminist, neo-Marxist, and postcolonial approaches, a delay whose effects are felt in Israel to this very day.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Israel's communication environment underwent far-reaching changes. Essentially, within a short period, Israel's electronic media rapidly developed from a system of one television channel and two government-controlled radio channels to a semiprivate, commercial, competitive multi-channel system. In this period there was a growing demand for audience studies on both the academic and professional levels at least partly resulted from these radical changes in the communication scene. The same period saw a gradual weakening of the positivist empirical research as the Department of Communication and Journalism at the HUJ (former Institute of Communication) accepted researchers interested in popular culture as well as linguistics, discourse and cultural studies and in using qualitative research methods (Liebes & Katz, 1990). These new approaches seeped into the system in parallel to the steady continuation of impressive research grounded in as functionalist approach and empirical quantitative methods. Although these new approaches

espoused a change in research focus, they never really challenged the dominant paradigm. This period has also seen a weakening of the relationship between the department and IASR who eventually ceased to act as an active research Institute.

Later on, new departments of communication and media (or at least programs) were opened at all major universities and in as many as eight academic colleges that were established in the nineties. Initially, the new departments (all headed by former HUJ scholars) were substantially influenced by the HUJ Department in terms of organization, research, and teaching. Eventually, scholars affiliated with different universities and colleges developed their own audience research, some of them empirical research based on quantitative methods and some of them a variety of qualitative ethnographic studies (Katriel, 2004)

In recent years, a younger generation of scholars has adopted the phenomenological-interpretive epistemology combined with reception theory, mostly employing ethnographic methodologies. Many of them have paid particular attention to minority groups and their positions as excluded and disenfranchised audience members. For instance, Brandeis-Barak (2007) studied women's reception patterns. Nimrod (2007, 2010) studied older adults. Elias (2008) focused on new immigrants from the former USSR. Kama studied gay men (2003) and disabled persons (2004) and their negotiations with mediated texts. Other audience studies sustain a more traditionalist approach, for example: Adoni, Caspi, and Cohen (2006) researched hybrid identities of the two largest minorities (i.e., Israeli-Arabs and Russian new immigrants). Cohen (2002) looked at the deconstruction of a TV series. Another line of research focuses on various aspects of the third-person effect (e.g., Tsfati & Cohen, 2003).

The privatization of applied social research in the communication field over the last two decade—such as public opinion studies or ratings of television viewing and radio listening conducted by commercial enterprises, including private research institutes or network research departments has influenced the applied social research in the field. Although government bodies continue to fund some communication research projects, most of the communication audiences and public opinion studies no longer serve as a quick and easily available means for gathering data considered important by policymakers. Furthermore, commercial research institutes see themselves as service providers, unlike the research community's self-conception as a partner in social policymaking, as was the case with the CI and the IASR.

In fact, the developments in Israel quite closely resembled the process documented in the 1993 *Journal of Communication* (Levy & Gurevitch, 1993), whereby stormy debates between paradigms finally resulted in a comfortable pluralistic compromise. The hegemony of the functional paradigm ended in the early 1990s, and the rapid development of various branches of cultural research opened the critical vistas of Israeli academics. In our opinion, however, the weakening of the positivist, empirical audience research extracted a heavy price in terms of interaction between the academic system and other social institutions, in particular the political institutions and the media organizations. The privatization of applied social research, coupled with the growing interest of media and advertising organizations in commercially oriented empirical studies that mostly lacked a critical perspective, significantly diminished academic involvement in applied social research. As a result, we are currently witnessing a

constant decline in the influence of audience research on social and cultural policies. However, the Second Authority for Television and Radio (the statutory regulatory body in charge of commercial channels) has been advancing audience research by allocating grants to established as well as emerging scholars. Some of these empirical efforts have been manifested in regulating commercial television production and supply in order to remedy audience groups' exclusion from the mediascape.

The introduction of cable television in the early 1990s marked a multi-channel mediascape and consequently triggered a new phase of audience research and encouraged commercial and academic research on its effects on audiences. Studies have looked at various socio-demographic variables and ramifications on many social levels (e.g., family, ethno-cultural communities, national) and the openness to transnational and global channels (Lemish, 2002; Nossek & Tidhar, 1994: Nossek & Adoni, 1996; Tidhar & Nossek, 2002; Weiman, 1996). The introduction of commercial terrestrial channels in 1993 and 2000 as well as the Direct Broadcasting Satellite (DBS) system competing with cable and commercial regional radio stations and the quick penetration of the internet have all also generated research on these media consumption (Adoni & Nossek, 2001, 2007). Exploring their implications on the changes in audiences' time allocation and media uses is one of the main current challenges of communication research in Israel.

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