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Neyazi, Taberez Ahmed; Saeed, Saima; Mazumdar, Suruchi

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“What does PolComm Stand for? Normative Dimensions of Political
Communication Research & Theorizing”

Global Perspectives in Political Communication: Insights from the 2024 ICA Political Communication Workshop in Delhi¹

Taberez Ahmed Neyazi, National University of Singapore

Saima Saeed, Jamia Millia Islamia

Suruchi Mazumdar, O. P. Jindal Global University

Introduction

It has been an honor to serve as the International Liaison for the Political Communication Division of the International Communication Association (ICA) from May 2022 to June 2024. Throughout my two-year tenure, I have been dedicated to fostering global connections and encouraging the engagement of scholars from regions traditionally underrepresented within our division. This commitment has been instrumental in the design and execution of the workshop aimed at spotlighting and advancing political communication research in the Global South, particularly within South and Southeast Asia.

I am privileged to co-author this report with Saima Saeed from Jamia Millia Islamia and Suruchi Mazumdar from O. P. Jindal Global University (JGU), whose invaluable contributions have been instrumental in ensuring its overall success. Saima Saeed facilitated the hosting of our workshop sessions at Jamia Millia Islamia, providing an academically rich environment. Suruchi Mazumdar’s efforts were pivotal in organizing the inaugural keynote at the JGU International Academy, Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, setting a high scholarly tone that resonated throughout the event. Their expertise not only facilitated the logistical aspects

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of these sessions but also enriched the intellectual content by suggesting panelists and mentors for the workshop.

Rationale for the Workshop

The imperative to convene this workshop stems from a multifaceted understanding of the evolving dynamics within the field of political communication. The development of political communication into a distinct academic field has historically been intertwined with the examination of democratic mechanisms like elections, campaigns, and persuasion, primarily within the Western context, particularly the United States (Karpf et al., 2015; Neyazi, 2023). As such, the academic narrative has predominantly been shaped by Western methodologies and frameworks, often overlooking the rich tapestry of political discourse manifest in the Global South (George, 2022; Rossini, 2023).

In contemporary discourse, political communication serves not only as a reflection of geopolitical realities but also as a formative influence on public opinion and policy-making. As such, the depth and breadth of political communication research must transcend parochial boundaries to embrace a truly global perspective. This workshop was strategically envisioned to recalibrate this imbalance by foregrounding voices and perspectives from South and Southeast Asia. The selection of Delhi as a venue underscores our commitment to enhancing the visibility of research emanating from these regions, which are often marginalized in mainstream academic discourse.

Further intellectual impetus for this workshop is derived from the pressing need to facilitate and foster opportunities for cross-national comparative research. Such endeavors are crucial for understanding the nuanced ways in which political communication research and their impacts vary across different cultural and political environments. Specifically, the workshop aims to catalyze collaborative studies involving countries in the European Union, North America, and South America alongside their counterparts in the Global South. By doing so, we aspire to develop a more comprehensive schema that seeks to understand the nuances of diverse political systems, examining their impacts on voter behavior, campaigns, democratic processes, and policymaking. This comparative understanding will enable us to draw more informed conclusions and facilitate meaningful dialogues between scholars in the Global North and Global South.

Moreover, the workshop seeks to bridge theoretical knowledge with practical applications, encouraging participants to engage in methodological innovation and interdisciplinary approaches. This convergence is expected to offer insights that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant, particularly in the era of digital media where the velocity and volume of information create complex new paradigms for political engagement and governance.

In summary, the workshop's rationale is rooted in the intellectual endeavor to expand the horizons of political communication research. By integrating and prioritizing research from underrepresented regions and fostering comparative studies, we aim to enrich the academic dialogue and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of global political dynamics.

Workshop Overview

The workshop was held in Delhi, chosen for its strategic relevance to our mission of expanding the geographical focus of political communication studies. The initiative draws inspiration from the long-standing Milan Summer School on Political Communication and seeks to extend its ethos by focusing on non-Western perspectives, which are crucial for a holistic understanding of the field. The workshop was attended by 29 selected participants, comprising 14 graduate students and 15 faculty members, research fellows, and early career researchers, from across 24 different universities and institutes. While the majority of the participants were from India (23 in total), there were six international attendees. The gender distribution was balanced, with 14 female participants and 15 male participants.

Over the course of two days, the workshop featured a series of presentations, keynotes, and panel discussions, all aimed at exploring cutting-edge research and methodologies within the field. The sessions were designed not only to enlighten but also to inspire our audience, particularly targeting graduate students and early-career scholars. The presentation included detailed examinations of research emerging from varied geopolitical landscapes, highlighting how different contexts shape political communication strategies and outcomes. These sessions provided valuable insights into the adaptability of methodologies across non-Western settings, and discussions focused on the challenges of conducting research that considers these diverse environments, facilitating a contextual understanding of the complex dynamics at play in global political communication landscapes.

The workshop included three key keynote addresses, each offering diverse perspectives and insights into the evolving field of political communication. The first, delivered by Kate Kenski, titled “Digital Communication and Conflict: How Internet Discourse Shapes Perceptions of the Political World,” highlighted the transformative impact of digital communication on political engagement and public perceptions of incivility, drawing on evidence from the American context. Cherian George emphasised the contextual dynamics of media politics in Asian settings with his talk, “Unique or Universalisable? Studying Media Politics in Asia,” challenging participants to consider the global applicability of locally observed phenomena. Finally, Rasmus K. Nielsen presented “A post-American field of political communication research: why we need it, how we might get there, what it might help us achieve,” advocating for a more inclusive and varied academic inquiry that extends beyond traditional Western-centric views. Each keynote not only provided substantial food for thought but also set the stage for rigorous scholarly discussions, emphasizing the need for a broader scope in political communication research.

The workshop concluded with a thought-provoking panel discussion titled “Redefining Political Communication in the Global South: Challenges and Opportunities.” This session brought together scholars to explore the specific challenges faced by researchers in the Global South and the unique opportunities these challenges present for the field of political communication. Panelists delved into topics such as the need for local case studies to inform global theories, the impact of regional political dynamics on communication strategies, and the pivotal role of emerging technologies in transforming political engagement within these diverse contexts. The discussion underscored the necessity of developing a nuanced understanding of political communication that respects and reflects the unique socio-political landscapes of the Global South. Overall, the workshop provided a unique platform for mentorship, fostering academic growth and preparing participants for future contributions, including submissions to the ICA annual conference.

Impact and Future Directions

The workshop not only served as a platform for knowledge exchange but also as a catalyst for future collaborative research initiatives. Participants expressed a high level of satisfaction, with many highlighting the opportunity to gain insights into diverse research paradigms and methodologies as particularly beneficial. Recognizing the potential for further development, the workshop concluded with a consensus on the need for methodological training sessions. Responding to this feedback, the organizing committee agreed to incorporate such sessions into future editions of the workshop. Building on the success of this event, plans are already underway to not only continue emphasizing inclusivity and diversity in political communication research but also to enhance the interactive nature of the workshop. Future editions aim to expand the geographical scope, potentially including more countries from the Global South, thereby enriching the workshop’s impact and reach.

Acknowledgements

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