

POSITIONING AUDIENCE RESEARCH FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE: A DOUBLE- DIALOGICAL APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Public dialogue can widen the knowledge base for decision making to make public policy and programmes more effective and accountable, in line with citizens' priorities. Audience research can enhance the relevance of a communication strategy to its objectives and to participants' needs and communication preferences. Audience research designs based on diffusion models of communication are, however, inadequate for the participatory objectives of public dialogue. This article, based on a Master's study by Kruger (2012), supports the use of a "double-dialogical" approach for designing audience research for communication strategies that emphasise participation. This approach emphasises listening over telling, building relationships over interrogating targets, and optimising inclusivity in determining communication objectives, identifying participants, framing issues, and selecting channels for deliberative dialogue. A corresponding framework of guidelines is offered for design and evaluation purposes in scholarly and practitioner communities, and can be adapted for various contexts of application. The article notes how the guidelines can be applied to evaluate the public consultation process of the Library and Information Services Transformation Charter, implemented in South Africa in 2009.

KEY WORDS

Audience research, communication models, communication programmes, community strategy design, design guidelines, double-dialogical approach, framework, Library and Information Science Transformation Charter, public dialogue

1. INTRODUCTION

Effective mechanisms for engaging the public in dialogue about science are important both for improving scientific literacy and for making science accountable to citizen's priority needs. Creating such mechanisms can be informed by audience research. This article is based on a Master's study by Kruger (2012), in which a framework of guidelines was developed for how audience research could be appropriately designed for communication programmes that aim to facilitate public dialogue about science. The framework is based on "a double-dialogical approach to audience research" (Kruger 2012), a concept coined to refer to audience research (defined in section 3 below) in which the research methods and the information elicited reflect dialogical objectives and principles.

The goal of this article is therefore to share this proposed framework and to support the use of a double-dialogical approach to audience research for planning and designing communication strategies that emphasise participation, i.e. to position audience research for public dialogue. The framework may hold value (if further explored) for Library and Information Science (LIS), especially for research on user studies and information behaviour aimed at improving information systems and services. It may especially offer some insight into the development of communication strategies that involve information users in defining their needs and contributing to the design (and even co-creation) of information systems and services. At present, research on audience research *per se* focuses very scantily on user studies and studies of information behaviour – despite the fact that these fields strongly focus on user needs and preferences. Although research on the design of information systems, libraries, portals and so on allows and accommodates the involvement of users (Hepworth 2004, 2007; Street & Ottoman 2007), it is not done from the point of view of audience research or a double-dialogical approach. The spirit of inclusive, participatory research and its core ideas are, however, reflected in the "one-size-does-not-fit-all" approach to communication campaigns, with the focus being more on the receiver, with the goal of greater dialogue and/or empowerment (Fourie 2008; Johnson & Case 2012; Williamson & Manazewic 2002). The information environment has changed to an interactive, user-driven one. For user studies and studies of information behaviour to inform and build interactive platforms (equivalent to dialogical communication in the study by Kruger [2012]), research methods need to adapt to position the user at the centre of communication, which begins at the stage of audience research. Although the work of Dervin (2006), Hoeijer (2008) and Massey (1976) is noted in this regard, this article and the study by Kruger (2012) can specifically support

interest from LIS scholars and practitioners to explore a double-dialogical approach to user involvement and participation. This implies enabling users to voice their opinions and experiences, so that users' (audiences') voices can be heard and listened to more intently. The concepts, rationale and arguments for a dialogical approach can serve as a point of departure. This may encourage LIS researchers to critically reflect on existing methods of collecting data on users' information needs and information behaviour (see the reviews by Case [2012], and Fisher and Julien [2009]). Here, this approach will be illustrated as a hypothetical evaluation of the public consultation phase of producing the LIS¹ Transformation Charter. The charter, commissioned by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) and the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS), presents a vision and a framework for a transformed LIS sector that can redress inequity and poverty, and contribute to a literate, reading society (DAC 2009).

The article offers some background on the study reported by Kruger (2012) and on the commissioned research project from which the study's research question arose (explained in more detail later). Thereafter, the importance of appropriate audience research for public dialogue will be argued with reference to the literature and with some clarification of concepts. The relationship between communication models and audience research design is traced to argue for a double-dialogical approach to audience research. A framework of guidelines is then presented for designing and evaluating audience research for public dialogue. Although Kruger (2012) developed generally applicable guidelines and then considered their application in the context of science, in this article the authors only report on the guidelines with respect to public dialogue in general, with the intention that these can have other fields of application. To illustrate their application, three guidelines have been selected to reflect on the methodology for public consultations for the LIS Transformation Charter (DAC 2009).

2 BACKGROUND OF THE PUB STUDY AND ITS EVALUATION

The dissertation by Kruger (2012) examined and was inspired by a case of commissioned audience research undertaken by Kruger (2007) for the Public Understanding of Biotechnology (PUB) programme – a public communication programme implemented by the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SAASTA) and funded by the Department of Science and Technology (SAASTA) (2012). With a mandate to advance public awareness, appreciation and engagement with science, engineering and technology in South Africa, SAASTA is required to make sophisticated disciplinary information and practices accessible, comprehensible and relevant to a diverse lay public. This is in line with an international drive for the public communication of science.

During the 2007 commissioned study (hereafter PUB study), the researcher faced the challenge of employing research methods that would be appropriate to the programme's stated objectives, namely to

[p]romote broad public awareness and balanced understanding of the potential of biotechnology, including the scientific principles and related ethical, moral and social issues; and create meaningful opportunities for public dialogue and debate on current and potential biotechnology applications within our society to enable informed decision-making. (SAASTA 2012)

The emphasis on multidimensionality, balance and public dialogue in these objectives denotes a participatory and democratic model of communication (Besette 2004; Davison, Brans & Schibeci 1997; People Science & Policy 2012), rather than a diffusion model of one-way communication from sender to receiver, with information dissemination and persuasion as its goals (Borchelt & Hudson 2008; Rogers 1999; Tufte & Mefalopulos 2009). Kruger (2007) reasoned that if audience research is to inform and lay foundations for participatory communication, then it should be designed and conducted in a manner corresponding to the structure and principles of participatory communication. However, many of the reported cases and methods of audience research were found to embed within them a top-down diffusion model of communication (Bull et al 2002; Colle 2002; Mody 1991; Slater 1996; Yankelovich 1996; Yoon 1996) which, according to Brendlinger, Dervin and Foreman-Wernet (1999), contributes to the failure of many communication campaigns.

Within the time constraints of the commissioned study, the researcher set out to develop and utilise a research design considered adequate for the programme's objectives, with which the study was completed. Thereafter, the study reported by Kruger (2012) offered an opportunity to evaluate the design of the commissioned study against a more thorough examination of the literature, addressing the question: How should audience research be designed and conducted when the objective of communication is to facilitate public dialogue?

Kruger (2012) utilised a case study strategy (Yin 1984) as the overall framework for systematically and holistically examining the PUB study, with the purpose of evaluating and learning from it as a case of applied audience research for public dialogue about science. A structured literature review provided the insights with which the case study was contextualised and an evaluation framework was built (an approach influenced by Barker & Pistrang 2005; Boaz & Ashby 2003; Furlong & Oancea 2005; Patton 1997; Rowe & Frewer 2000). First, literature on audience research, participatory development communication and public dialogue was analysed, whereby an initial set of guidelines were developed for designing audience research for public dialogue about any issue. Second, literature concerning the communication and democratisation of science was examined in an attempt to understand the challenges inherent in public dialogue about science. (Calls for the democratisation of science arise from a participatory model of

science communication, where diverse perspectives are heard and recognised to hold the processes and products of science accountable to citizens, in contrast with science communication that aims merely to persuade and gain support for science.) The guidelines were revised to take these challenges into consideration for application in the particular context of science and biotechnology communication. The final guidelines were then applied as an evaluation framework to the PUB study. This involved systematically assessing the presence and quality of the suggestions of each guideline within the design of the PUB study (following Rowe & Frewer 2000).

A revised set of guidelines is presented in this article, without science-specific references. Scholars and practitioners can adapt these guidelines to their own context by revising the guidelines according to the particularities of their context, as was done in the study reported by Kruger (2012) on public dialogue about science. In other words, relevant literature can be reviewed in order to adapt the guidelines to, for example, the design of information systems, urban planning, or participatory decision-making related to government budgets.

The following section explains the conceptual background and the significance of positioning audience research for public dialogue.

3. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF APPROPRIATE AUDIENCE RESEARCH FOR PUBLIC DIALOGUE

The call for public dialogue can be located in the field of communication – specifically, development communication – which has been characterised, in part, by ongoing tension between two conceptual models of *diffusion* and *participation* (Melkote & Steeves 2001). Whereas the diffusion paradigm emphasises telling, information, education and persuasion, the participatory paradigm emphasises listening, exchanges and action among diverse actors around a common issue. Each paradigm has its strengths and weaknesses, and it is believed that considering these as complementary rather than competing models is most productive for achieving informed and balanced communication (Colle 2002; Singhal 2005). The principles and goals of the participatory paradigm – greater engagement in social and political processes, sustainable change and collective action – are, however, given precedence over the top-down, persuasion-oriented biases of the diffusion model (Kruger 2012). <It> might be applied to health promotion and community involvement.

Influenced by participatory democratic governance and human-rights approaches (Hicks 2008; McCall 2010), forms of participation are called for which position citizens as not merely ‘users and choosers’, but as ‘makers and shapers’ of public policy (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001). A notorious case is that of the Treatment Action Campaign, where

clients of the health system mobilised to influence the provision of antiretroviral medication. Public dialogue refers to a participatory engagement process, inclusive of divergent actors and perspectives, and using various forms and tools of multi-directional communication, in which citizens and stakeholders collaborate, deliberate and provide input into decision making and problem solving surrounding issues of broad public importance (Friedman 2010; Kruger 2012).

Effective public dialogue can contribute to making public policy and programmes more accountable to priority needs and public values, more relevant to existing contexts and resources, and more effective in producing widely felt benefits that address social, economic and environmental injustices (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001; Eguren 2008; Tufte & Mefalopulos 2009). For public dialogue to be effective, it should involve sustained engagement processes that have clear objectives; are widely representative; use accessible, inclusive and cost-effective methods; provide accurate balanced information; elicit useful contributions; and are transparent, suitably timed and linked to official decision making (Cox et al 2009; Glover & Keeley 2009; Omamo & Von Grebmer 2005; Petts 2008; POST 2001; Rowe & Frewer 2000). Getting all of this right requires careful planning, in which audience research can play a valuable role in terms of informing the various aspects of designing a communication strategy.

According to Mody (1991:62), formative audience research “refers to the systematic collection and analysis of evidence to aid decision-making during the planning, design, and production stages of a programme, product or system”. Such evidence includes an understanding of relevant audiences, their existing knowledge and perceptions, their communication preferences, and so forth. This is distinct from audience monitoring research (which measures reach/exposure during implementation) and summative audience research (which evaluates the impact of communication). Formative audience research can inform a communication strategy’s design in order to meet its objectives effectively and enhance its relevance to participants’ needs and communication preferences (Dellinger 2006; Melkote & Steeves 2001; Mody 1991; Noar 2006).

The question is: What would make for good-quality, appropriate audience research in the context of public dialogue? Historically, much of audience research has been dominated by a focus on commercial and entertainment media and on individualistic, consumerist television audiences. The question therefore resonates with scholarly debates in audience studies, in which audience research has been called to seek new directions and relevance in light of changing communication contexts and wider domains, including that of civil society and the public sphere (Livingstone 1998), and to uphold a more empowering notion of audiences (Freimuth & Mettger 1990). Figure 1 illustrates the significance of determining what would make for appropriate audience research, which can help to inform effective public dialogue, which can, in turn, contribute to improved public policy and programmes.

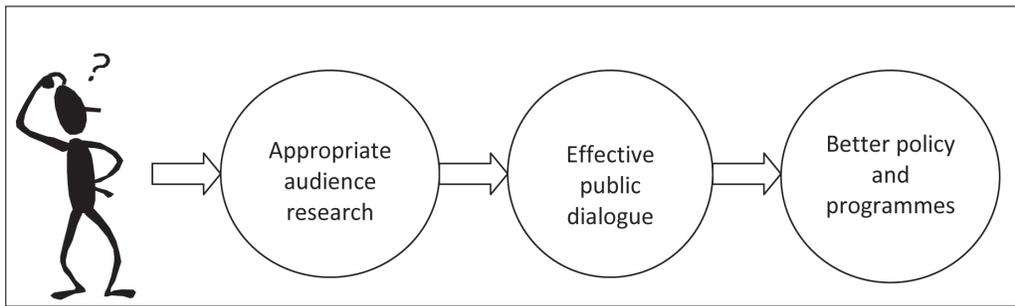


Figure 1: The importance of appropriate audience research for better policy and programmes

Given the potentially valuable contribution of audience research to effective communication, and ultimately to development outcomes, it is crucial that scholars and practitioners engage consciously and critically with the methodology and process of audience research, in terms of its purpose and the context in which it is to be applied. Whereas the quality and impact of academic research are determined through peer-review mechanisms and citation indexing, applied research of public interest should be subject not only to criteria of scientific robustness, but to dimensions of socio-economic relevance and accountability (Arnold 2004; Boaz & Ashby 2003; Gibbons et al 1994). One such dimension, termed “fitness for purpose and utility”, holds that the research design should be appropriate to the purpose (or goal) and intended use of the study, and responsive to the needs and contexts of users (Boaz & Ashby 2003; Furlong & Oancea 2005; Patton 1997). This dimension underpins the approach proposed in this article, where the relationship between goal and method becomes paramount. This principle can be referred to as the GOAL-METHOD logic (Kruger 2012).

The design of audience research should be considered in relation to different models of communication, as explored in the following section.

4. TOWARDS A DOUBLE-DIALOGICAL APPROACH TO AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Following the GOAL-METHOD logic, a suitable approach is needed to audience research – an approach that is suitable for participatory development communication strategies, rather than for serving the needs of diffusion-oriented communication. Figure 2 outlines a framework for considering approaches to audience research in relation to communication models. It places both audience research approaches and models of communication on a continuum, from what Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009:29–30) call monologic (diffusion-oriented) to dialogic (participatory) modalities.

Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4
No audience research	Monologic audience research	Dialogic audience research	Dialogic audience research
–	–	–	–
Monologic communication	Monologic communication	Monologic communication	Dialogic communication
Monologic		→	Dialogic

Figure 2: Audience research approaches in relation to communication models

The figure shows a progression – discussed in greater detail below – from Block 1 in which one-way communication is implemented without any audience research whatsoever, through Block 2 in which one-way communication is based on audience research that embeds within it the top-down paradigm of diffusion approaches. In Block 3 audience research is conducted in a dialogical or participatory fashion, but still in order to inform one-way communication. Block 4 represents the scenario of interest to this article, in which dialogical audience research contributes to dialogical communication specifically, hence the term “double-dialogical”.

4.1 NO AUDIENCE RESEARCH FOR ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION: BLOCK 1

Early development communication campaigns based on the diffusion-of-innovations theory are criticised for the many assumptions made about what audiences needed to know, and in what form and through what media they should receive messages designed for them (Melkote & Steeves 2001). Such cases correspond to the first block in Figure 2, which represents doing no audience research whatsoever when planning uni-directional campaigns.

4.2 ONE-WAY AUDIENCE RESEARCH FOR ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION: BLOCK 2

With time, social marketing models (drawing from commercial marketing techniques) tried to relieve the problem represented in Block 1, by systematically considering the needs and interests of various audience segments and then basing communication interventions on such information (Melkote & Steeves 2001). This is represented in Block 2, in which monologic audience research (explained below) is carried out to inform monologic or diffusion-oriented communication.

A large portion of the literature to be found on audience research is aimed at diffusion-oriented communication, including film, television and radio programming (Cox 1983; Skeggs, Thumin & Wood 2008; Stavitsky 1995) as well as social marketing, health and

behaviour change communication (Bull et al 2002; Colle 2002; Slater 1996). Audience research in the development communication and public health fields has been strongly influenced by the origins of audience research in the commercial media and marketing industry, where it has been driven by commercial imperatives and is aimed at attracting audiences, selling exposure to certain market segments to advertisers, and persuading consumer-audiences of a particular viewpoint (Yoon 1996:el.). Similarly, social marketing approaches use techniques of persuasion to ‘market’ a particular behaviour to consumer-audiences (see Bull et al 2002), assuming that individuals’ knowledge, attitudes and behaviour are to blame for their situation.

In these contexts, audience research is carried out within a diffusion-oriented message design and production process, to inform the question of “*who says what to whom through what channel and with what effect?*” Audiences are understood as receivers of messages that are intended to bring about a change in knowledge, attitude or behaviour. ‘Monologic’ audience research methods may embed within them this top-down transmission model which, according to Brendlinger, Dervin and Foreman-Wernet (1999:el.), contributes to the failure of many communication campaigns. This is the case where audience research uses surveys and opinion polls that impose predetermined concepts and assumptions, elicit uninformed opinions, and do not allow research subjects an opportunity to share unanticipated views and influence communication planning (Brendlinger et al 1999; Freimuth & Mettger 1990; Mody 1991; PSP 2012; Yankelovich 1996) (see 4.3, overall research design guidelines).

4.2 DIALOGIC AUDIENCE RESEARCH FOR ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION: BLOCK 3

Block 3 in Figure 2 indicates a turn towards audience-participatory research, but nonetheless to inform one-way communication. The trend towards a participatory approach in development communication raised the value of involving the audience in the process of audience analysis, rather than simply making them the subjects of analysis (Snyder 2003). Mody (1991) describes this approach as a form of dialogue between audience and message-producer, letting the audience influence the message design. Snyder (2003:172) describes audience research participation as “conducting intensive research with members of the target audience prior to designing a campaign, using the feedback to refine campaign goals, targets, messages, persuasion strategy, and channels”. While referencing audience participation, this phrase is explicit in employing concepts of diffusion-oriented communication, such as campaign, target and persuasion.

When diffusion-oriented campaigns are the communication strategy required in a given situation, the use of formative audience research can make for more effective outcomes. In a meta-analysis of ten years (1995–2005) of mass-media health communication campaigns, Noar (2006:25) found that campaigns are more likely to succeed in achieving their intended health outcomes when designers conduct formative audience research and

use the findings (combined with theoretical foundations) to segment audiences, design targeted and creative messages that spark interpersonal discussion, and strategically position campaign messages in the most appropriate channels.

However, when a dialogical communication strategy is required, as Bessette (2004) points out, the focus is no longer on developing messages to be disseminated by a sender via a media channel to a receiver. So, while the model proposed by Mody (1991) involves dialogue in the early stages of communication strategy design, it still serves a “top-down [communication model] with the receivers treated as targets for persuasion and change” (Melkote & Steeves 2001:242). Thus, the need remains for audience research which is appropriate to participatory communication.

4.3 DIALOGIC AUDIENCE RESEARCH FOR DIALOGIC COMMUNICATION: BLOCK 4

As stated earlier, the interest of this article specifically lies in the positioning of dialogic audience research for dialogic models of communication, as represented by Block 4 in Figure 2. Audience research is needed that will meet the objectives of participatory communication, in which audiences are seen not merely as receivers of messages, but also as senders and actors who participate in various forms and directions of interaction, each bringing unique and valuable perspectives to the issue at hand (Bessette 2004; Melkote & Steeves 2001:248).

This resonates with trends in scholarly debate in the field of audience studies, in which audience research has been called to seek new directions and relevance in light of changing communication contexts, influenced by technology in particular, and wider domains, including those of civil society and the public sphere (Livingstone 1998). Opponents of individualistic and consumerist approaches to audience research have sought, instead, to emphasise the cultural and social imperatives of media (Stavitsky 1995), a more empowering notion of audiences, and a greater awareness of the surrounding social and structural forces influencing human development (Freimuth & Mettger 1990).

Formative audience research can therefore become applicable beyond the world of communication campaigns, in other development communication efforts such as establishing platforms for ongoing communication (Feek 2009) or implementing various forms of projects. Childers and Vajrathan (in Colle 2002:53), proponents of Development Support Communications, note: “The first ‘act’ of communication in a development project is in fact research in the project community of human beings.” Decades of documented experience in implementing development projects have taught practitioners and researchers the importance of conducting research by engaging with local stakeholders at the beginning of a development project (Anyaegebunam et al 2004; Yoon 1996:el.). Whether a communication programme will eventually involve information dissemination or dialogue, or both, Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009:14) hold

that it is crucial for the research stage of a communication programme to prioritise dialogic communication: “This greatly reduces the possibility of relying on incorrect assumptions and avoids the risk of alienating relevant stakeholders by leaving them out of the decision-making process.”

A new set of responsibilities and questions arises for the audience researcher when communication becomes not only about telling but also about listening, considering the existing and diverse conversations at play amongst audience members or stakeholders, and using communication as a means to achieve greater social engagement. When participatory principles are embedded in both the audience research process and the communication programme, as in Block 4, the lines begin to blur between research, communication and action; and between researcher, audience and producer (hence the dotted line in the figure). This is evident in approaches such as participatory communication strategy design and participatory media methodologies.

4.4 THE PRINCIPLES OF A DOUBLE-DIALOGICAL APPROACH

Double-dialogical audience research (Kruger 2012) is an approach to designing and conducting audience research which follows participatory principles in both its purpose and its design, ensuring a coherent GOAL-METHOD relationship. Thus, when the objective of communication is public dialogue, audience research becomes about building relationships, establishing trust, and initiating an inclusive conversation amongst diverse stakeholders with differing access to means of communication, rather than interrogating targets and developing audience ‘intelligence’ that serves the need of persuasion-oriented communication. It places people at the centre of the conversation, not as passive receivers of information but as active citizens and participants in communication and action, whose views and contributions must be appreciated and understood so that the gaps between participants can be bridged and constructive dialogue can take place. Audience research could inform how to transmit messages and wisdom between, across and amongst participants. If audience research is about enhancing the relevance and appropriateness of communication to the audience’s needs, it serves a crucial role for enhancing the inclusivity of public dialogue.

In essence, the circular, iterative notion of communication and audience research presented in this article represents an entirely different ‘geometry’ of communication than the linear, one-way model implied by the sentence: *Who says what to whom through what channels and to what effect?* The elements suggested in this phrase (why, who, what and how) provide the structure for the framework of guidelines on how to design and conduct audience research for public dialogue.

5. A SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR DOUBLE-DIALOGICAL AUDIENCE RESEARCH

To determine what would make for good-quality, appropriate audience research in the context of public dialogue, a framework of guidelines is offered that can be used by scholars and communication practitioners for designing and evaluating audience research for dialogical communication. Further details on the guidelines and development thereof are provided by Kruger (2012). The guidelines were developed and should be seen with the following approach and intention in mind: The guidelines

- do not prescribe step-by-step blueprint instructions for designing audience research for public dialogue. Instead, they follow a learning approach, with guidelines to be applied critically and with flexibility in relation to specific contexts of practice, where environmental factors mediate the appropriateness of methods. This approach is supported by several authors (Furlong & Oancea 2005:11; Mays & Pope 2000:51; Patton 1999:330; Rowe & Frewer 2000:24).
- are formulated as suggested actions and considerations, pointing to important principles and areas for attention. They can be used both to design audience research, and to evaluate such design.
- focus on the dimension of ‘fitness for purpose’ – the appropriateness of the design and the conducting of audience research for the goal and context of communication – while acknowledging the importance of other dimensions, such as methodological rigour, cost-effectiveness and the ethical and relational aspects of research.

5.1 GUIDELINES FOR DESIGN AND EVALUATION

The framework begins with the end in mind, considering firstly the WHY element, by clarifying the objectives of communication and audience research. Since the purpose and intended use of the audience research guide the approach, the next set of GENERAL guidelines considers the overall research design. Thereafter, guidelines are offered for the WHO element by considering how audiences should be conceptualised and investigated in a dialogical approach. The WHAT question is addressed by guidelines on how the topic of communication can be framed in a dialogical way. Lastly, the investigation of channels of communication is addressed by a set of HOW guidelines. Together these guidelines, presented in Table 1, constitute a framework which can be used for guiding the design and evaluation of audience research for public dialogue in general.

Table 1: Guidelines for designing and conducting audience research for public dialogue

<p>WHY guidelines: Clarifying objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarify the intended purpose of communication for which audience research is required. • Determine the intention of the state or other relevant authority to respond to and incorporate public input in decision making. • Consider the relative value and feasibility of public dialogue and information dissemination strategies for the particular context, issue and available resources. • Investigate various stakeholders' motivations for communicating about issues, and explore how the lay public's motivation to participate can be enhanced. • Define the purpose and role of audience research within the broader communication programme and consider any ethical implications thereof.
<p>GENERAL guidelines: Overall research design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the active participation of stakeholders in communication-strategy design and implementation. • Consider audience research as one step in an ongoing process of communication, not a tool to determine conclusive public opinion, emphasising that ongoing communication processes are required for reaching informed opinions. • Employ multiple methods, reflexivity and broad participant-selection to optimise inclusivity and minimise the influence of a priori assumptions, bias and power differentials. • Use open-ended methods to uncover participants' language use, values and framing of issues in the context of their daily lives. • Allow time and interactivity in the research process for participants to consider a balanced range of simply stated views, consider both risks and benefits, develop opinions, pose questions and voice concerns.
<p>WHO guidelines: Understanding communication participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise audiences as active, diverse, contributing stakeholders, where citizens, representative civil society groups, decision makers, technical experts and the state are all considered participants with varying roles in public dialogue. • Map the multiple stakeholders in a system of dialogue, including the web of interactions, areas of divergence and alliance, existing communication networks and power dynamics amongst them. • Identify who are considered trusted sources of information amongst technical experts from a range of relevant disciplines, and explore their preparedness for public dialogue. • Investigate the range of variables that influence participants' potential role in public dialogue, such as their interests, values, concerns, technical aptitude and situated expertise in relation to the issue. • Systematically use these communication variables to propose audience segments or stakeholder groups in relation to the purpose and topic, with awareness of the possibilities and limitations of various methodological approaches, and a commitment to continued revision and inclusivity.

WHAT guidelines: Framing the issues

- Explore the range of perspectives and framing of the issues, including participants’ opinions, questions and concerns, to inform the inclusive framing-for-deliberation in ongoing discussions.
- Investigate the social context, practical experience and existing belief and value systems through which issues are understood and assessed.
- Avoid bias or any limitation of the scope of issues by designing questions to start broad and open; and gradually focus inwards, framing questions and probing responses in a balanced, open way.
- Facilitate and observe interactive discussions in order to understand how issues are spoken of, what language is used and what values come into play, in order to convey issues in easy, socially relevant, lay terms and in an accessible language and style.

HOW guidelines: Investigating channels and spaces for public dialogue

- Assess communication preferences and possible channels in terms of both dialogue and information dissemination – how to provide balanced, open information, elicit a wide range of views, enable interactivity and facilitate existing initiatives.
- Use open-ended enquiry to map the range of existing and potential communication resources, networks and mechanisms through which people both receive and send information, then consider their appropriateness for the particular topic, context and nature of audiences.
- In pursuit of inclusivity and diversity in public dialogue, identify communication channels that allow the accessibility and visibility of all languages, cultural contexts and levels of literacy – especially among those groups which are often marginalised and those who may at first not express an interest in the topic.
- Consider the suitability for the given situation of using structured processes for public engagement that enable deliberation, dialogue and the emergence of collective intelligence.

5.2 APPLICATION OF THE GUIDELINES

In the study reported by Kruger (2012), the guidelines were applied to the PUB study in order to judge the appropriateness of its design and to extract lessons for similar cases of audience research. The PUB study afforded an opportunity to demonstrate the use of the guidelines for evaluation purposes and to ground this study in the experience of an actual case of commissioned audience research for an existing programme in all its real-life complexity. The framework of guidelines succeeded in revealing the strengths and weaknesses of an audience research project. The guidelines can make a contribution to critical debate and are an adaptable application for use by researchers as required in a particular context. Applied in a range of contexts, such as participatory budgeting, urban planning, information system design or information service design, the guidelines can be tested for their practical applicability for both design and evaluation purposes. Through iterative testing and refinement by communication scholars and practitioners, the guidelines can be strengthened and offered to a wider community of users in a more substantive, user-friendly form. It would especially be useful if the guidelines can be assessed by librarians and information specialists, as demonstrated in the following example.

5.3 POTENTIAL APPLICATION TO AN EVALUATION OF THE LIS CHARTER PROCESS

A specific area of application of these guidelines could be for reviewing the round of public consultations recently conducted in all nine provinces of South Africa, as part of the creation of the LIS Transformation Charter (DAC 2009).

For example, one of the WHY guidelines for clarifying objectives recommends: “Consider the relative value and feasibility of public dialogue and information dissemination strategies for the particular context, issue and available resources.” The charter (2009:vi–vii) positions the LIS sector in terms of its “contribution to the development of a just, prosperous and cohesive society” and aims “to augment the sector’s capacity to contribute in a sustainable way to the elimination of inequality and poverty”. Public dialogue, with its principles of inclusivity and participative democracy, can therefore be considered an apt approach to have used for the LIS charter, considering its transformation agenda. The guideline also points to the need for disseminating information to stakeholders, to support informed deliberative dialogue at various stages of the methodology. The question of sufficient available resources would have been considered to allow the LIS public consultations to be conducted in all nine provinces, such as transport facilities in the more rural provinces, easily accessible venues for people with disabilities, and catering for attendees.

Under the GENERAL guidelines relating to overall research design, there is the guideline: “Promote active participation of stakeholders in communication strategy design and implementation.” This guideline could be used to probe to what extent the charter team involved stakeholders (librarians, publishers, booksellers, local government, library users, etc.) prior to consultations, in order to improve attendance and ownership of the process and to identify key LIS issues specific to each province. This could ensure that the opportunity provided by each meeting is used effectively, that stakeholders’ input is captured effectively, and that their own motivations and interests are acknowledged in the overall process of eventually implementing the charter’s recommendations.

Another important guideline with a bearing on the LIS charter process, is from the HOW guidelines, about investigating channels and spaces for public dialogue:

In pursuit of inclusivity and diversity in public dialogue, identify communication channels that allow the accessibility and visibility of all languages, cultural contexts and levels of literacy, especially those groups often marginalised and those who may at first not express interest in the topic. (<ref>)

The LIS charter report (<ref>) notes as a limitation of the methodology that “the representivity of the data in respect of province, LIS stakeholders, urban and rural areas, literate and illiterate persons, and so forth, was uneven and can be questioned”. The report notes in particular the difficulty of reaching learners and students, which is unfortunate considering the recognition elsewhere in the document of the importance of

school LIS and South Africa's youthful population. This limitation, considered in light of the quoted HOW guideline, points to the value of prior audience research to inform the planning of public consultations, so as to maximise inclusivity and accessibility to relevant stakeholders.

These three guidelines, applied to the LIS charter, are merely suggestive of how the framework of guidelines proposed in this article can be used for planning or evaluating similar public consultation processes relating to the development of library and information policy in the future.

6. CONCLUSION

This article addresses the call for greater relevance of audience research in new communication contexts and domains, particularly in civil society and the public sphere (Livingstone 1998). In these contexts, an alternative approach is offered to audience research which is based on a participatory model of communication, and can help to build a foundation for effective, inclusive public dialogue.

The article provides practical guidance for the first steps of the process of public dialogue, a methodological praxis for audience research that can be useful in scholarly and practitioner communities. The guidelines are offered as a contribution to critical debate and an adaptable application for use by researchers to meet the needs of a particular context. Others are invited to apply the guidelines in different contexts to test their practical applicability for both design and evaluation purposes, as has been illustrated with reference to the LIS Transformation Charter. It is imagined that through iterative testing and refinement by communication scholars and practitioners, the guidelines can be strengthened and offered to a wide community of users in a substantive, user-friendly form.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Masters' study (Kruger 2012) on which this article reports was based on commissioned audience research (Kruger 2007) made possible by the Public Understanding of Biotechnology programme, funded by the Department of Science and Technology and implemented by the South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement (SASTA).

NOTES

- 1 The acronym LIS is used for Library and Information Services as well as Library and Information Science.

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