

# Looking for a Technician and/or a Philosopher: Media Education in Contemporary Indonesia

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## Abstract

*During the last years of the Suharto's regime, there has been an increasing interest in the critical approach to the social sciences. Students saw social sciences, including communication and media studies, as tools to fight the authoritarian power. Such trends continue to this time, communication students in increasing numbers are interested in the questions of power and its distribution and how readings of the media are being done by the audience. Soon after the fall of Suharto, the reform movements forced the new administration to deregulate the media industry. This liberalization enables the industry to expand in both the electronic media and the print media, creating job opportunities in the industry. Communication quickly becomes one of the most competitive higher-learning fields in Indonesia, students swarm communication schools, fighting primarily for a seat in the broadcast programs. As a result, communication educators and managers now have to face a unique situation in which they have to do balancing acts between two very different paradigms: "empiricist" and "critical."*

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The fall of Suharto and his New Order Regime in Indonesia doubtlessly constitutes a significant juncture in the history of the country. It is a significant event for both the media industry

and the media education, not only because the media taken as a whole is considered as an important contributing factor to the reform movements (Hidayat et al., 2000) but also because the movements—and the resulting reforms—brought about many significant changes in the media industry.

During the last years of the Suharto's era, viewpoints opposing the authoritarian power gradually gained legitimacy and their share of claims to the truth. In the beginning, the resistance had limited fora through which grievances and criticisms can be voiced, chief among those are smaller student demonstration, the internet, and the underground press (see Winters, 2002; Menayang, Nugroho, & Listiorini, 2002). But, when the student demonstration became a strong force that had to be reckoned with, the mainstream media cannot help but gradually giving more time and space to the public grievances and dissatisfaction and, later on, turning very critical towards the regime. It is during this time that cultural and critical thoughts reentered the Indonesian communication education settings. Students were becoming interested in the concepts and theories that incorporate references and analyses of power and its distribution. Such approaches seemed to offer interesting explanations of the situations at the time. Dominance and resistance become an important part of the vocabulary of the students, although, interestingly, they were not used widely among the faculty.

After the Reformation—as the movements surrounding the fall of Suharto are widely known in Indonesia—changes within the media industry is among the most apparent. Censorship was virtually gone from the scene and deregulation of the media resulted in the emergence of new media establishments, both print and electronic. At the same time, the economy started to move again and the advertising industry quickly rose almost to the level before the Asian crisis. All these factors worked simultaneously to create job opportunities in the communication-related industries and, thus, making communication education seems more attractive to potential students.

This paper discusses the two seemingly contradictory trends within the communication education in Indonesia. On the one hand, students are flocking the communication education and training to gain practical skills and knowledge to get a job in the expanding media industry. On the other hand, students, also in increasing numbers came to demand that the university provide them with intellectual materials that could turn them into communication “scholars”. Moreover, they tend to see scholarly works as primarily non-empirical and critical.

The current paper mainly provides a casual description about communication education in the University of Indonesia, although there are indications that these trends also exist in other schools in Indonesia as suggested in the special issue of *Jurnal Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia* (ISKI, 1998). One can also argue that some main public universities are the dominant trendsetters in the communication education, and that among them the University of Indonesia is still the most influential. Some data from other important communication schools are presented as a comparison. Further, the analysis emphasizes more on the undergraduate level—known as the *Sarjana* level or *S1* in Indonesia. However, to grasp a more comprehensive view of communication and media education in Indonesia, important trends shown in the *Diploma 3 (D3)* programs and in the Masters Program (*S2* or *Sarjana 2*) have to be incorporated.

### Communication Education in Indonesia

Out of the 48 main state universities in Indonesia (those that participated in the national entrance test system or *Seleksi Penerimaan Mahasiswa Baru* in 2003), only 13 universities

have an undergraduate communication program, compared to 39 for management and 20 for sociology (PPSPMB, 2003). These include the big universities such as the University of North Sumatera, Medan; the University of Padjadjaran, Bandung; the University of Diponegoro, Semarang; the University of Gadjah Mada, Yogyakarta; University of Sebelas Maret, Surakarta; the University of Airlangga, Surabaya; the University of Hasanuddin, Makassar; and the University of Sam Ratulangi, Manado. These universities cover the whole of Indonesia from the Western part to the Eastern part, with a significant exception that there is currently no state university in Kalimantan (Borneo) offering a communication program.

In all but the University of Padjadjaran in Bandung communication is a department in the College of Social and Political Sciences. In the University of Padjadjaran, communication is a separate college (called *Fakultas Ilmu Komunikasi* or College of Communication Sciences). With the exception of a few, all universities only offer communication at the undergraduate level. Masters programs are offered in five of the universities: the University of Indonesia, the University of Padjadjaran, the University of Sebelas Maret, the University of Airlangga, and the University of Hassanuddin. Three universities, the University of Indonesia, the University of Padjadjaran, and the University of Hassanuddin, offer graduate program up to the doctoral level.

**Table 1: State Universities offering Graduate Programs in Indonesia**

No	University	Masters Program	Doctoral Program
1	University of Indonesia	X	X
2	University of Padjadjaran	X	X
3	University of Sebelas Maret	X	
4	University of Airlangga	X	
5	University of Hassanuddin	X	X

Note: the universities are ordered by geographical location, from West to East Indonesia.

Even fewer private universities offer graduate communication program in the traditional sense. Because of the accreditation system in Indonesia, it is difficult to ascertain how many private universities are actually offering communication at the graduate level. Two of the better known masters programs are in the University of Professor Doctor Moestopo and the University of Sahid, both are located in Jakarta. For the purpose of describing the communication education in Indonesia, other private universities offering a graduate program, if any, are of a lesser significance.

At the undergraduate level, the private universities are quickly improving and some are considered to be, at least, at the same level as the state universities. Communication seems to be a popular program and many private universities had opened up an undergraduate communication program in the past three years. At a more practical level, training for communication skills are being offered through a diploma program, that is known as the D3 program. Both existing communication schools and new schools established specifically for such trainings are offering D3 programs. It has to be noted here that in the Indonesian educational system, the S1 (BA) program requires the fulfillment of 144 credits, while the D3 (Diploma) is a 110-credit program. As an illustration, data from West Java and Banten, two important provinces, is attached.

Schools described in Table 2 are 12 out of 337 institutions that offer communication study that are officially registered to the higher learning authority *Kopertis* Region IV (Koordinasi Perguruan Tinggi Swasta Wilayah IV Jawa Barat dan Banten or the Consortium of Private Higher Learning Institutions Region IV of West Java and Banten). The data shows that as of June 2003 the 337 private institutions consist of 38 universities, 4 institutes, 191 higher learning schools (*sekolah tinggi* or *hogeschool* in the Dutch tradition), 84 academies, and 20 polytechnic schools (*Kopertis* IV, 2003). As shown in Table 2, many of the communication programs were only recently established. Exactly half of the communication programs are established within the past 4 years. Although the traditional separation into Advertising, Public Relations, and Journalism is the norm in Indonesia, almost all schools in these two provinces only use the generic label of communication for their program, suggesting that the program would have a bigger portion of theoretical courses. Further, it is most likely that these "generic communication" programs will be geared more towards mass communication, since the other levels of communication analysis are not very popular in Indonesia.

It cannot be overemphasized that this is not a portrait of communication education in Indonesia. However, West Java and Banten are the provinces enclosing the capital Jakarta and thus their characteristics might be more similar to Jakarta than the rest of the country. Because of the centralization policy during the 32 years of the New Order regime in Indonesia, the demand for professionals in communication is also very imbalanced between Jakarta and the rest of the country. All of the private television stations are based in Jakarta and advertising accounts of a significant value are available only to players in the capital city. In summary, communication is becoming popular in Indonesia with more schools are opened up to offer this study program. Most schools cannot claim that they are well-equipped to train students to be media and communication professionals so that the logical choice is to label the program as a generic communication program.

### **Environmental Factors Shaping Communication Education Trends**

Before we discuss the environmental factors that influence communication education in Indonesia, it is necessary to analyze the mechanisms through which such factors can actually have uniform effects among schools that are spread all over Indonesia. The most important mechanism is the dominance of several main state universities over the rest of the state universities as well as the private universities. Because of this dominance, references and materials almost always come from the dominant universities. Secondly, the educational system is regulated through what is known as the national curriculum that has to be followed by all universities, and this national curriculum is shaped more by educators from the dominant universities. Until recently, there is also a state test for some main courses, meaning that students in the private universities have to pass the tests prepared by mostly lecturers from the public universities. Consequently, course syllabi in the private universities are usually structured exactly like what the public university lecturers want. Thirdly, the accreditation system also encourages schools to just copy curricula and course syllabi from bigger schools, making all schools seem very similar to each other, at least, on paper. Fourthly, as shown above, only a few universities are offering communication graduate programs so that lecturers from campuses all over Indonesia have to come to these few schools to get their graduate training. Lastly, several fora, including the Indonesian Communication Scholar Association (*ISKI*, *Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia*) with its regular workshops and seminars and its journal are dominated by lecturers of the public universities, ensuring that the dominance is maintained even through scholarly activities.

Table 2: Private Institutions Offering Communication in West Java and Banten (12 of 337 institutions)

No.	Name	Year Established				Comm. Study Program					Level		Form of Unit***			
		< 2000	2000	2001	2002	General	PR	Adv.	Jour.	Others	S1	D3	Prog.	Dept.	Coll.	Institute
1	Universitas Pasundan	X				X					X			X		
2	Universitas Islam Nusantara	X					X		X	X*	X			X		
3	Universitas Islam Bandung	X				X					X			X		
4	Universitas Djuanda	X							X							X
5	Universitas Komputer Indonesia		X			X					X		X			
6	Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon		X			X					X	X	X			
7	Universitas "ARS" Internasional		X			X					X	X	X			
8	Universitas Kebangsaan				X	X					X			X		
9	STIKOM Bandung	X				X					X	X				X
10	Akademi Komunikasi Radio dan Televisi Utama	X				X						X				X
11	Politeknik LP3I Bandung			X		X						X	X			
12	Politeknik Kencana Bandung			X					X**		X	X				

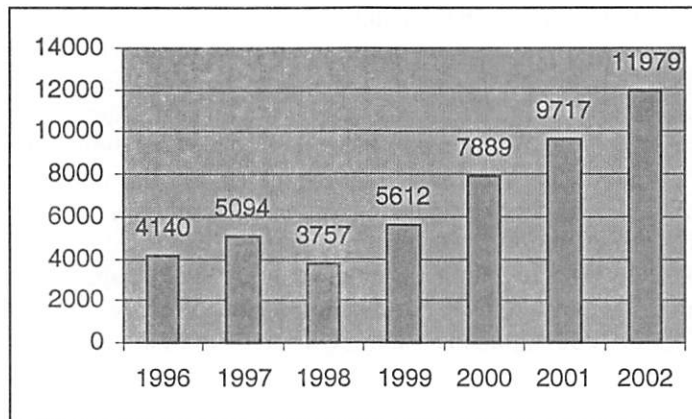
Note: Adapted from *Pikiran Rakyat* (2003a, 2003b); \*Library Sciences; \*\*Radio Broadcast; \*\*\*Form of unit: Program within a department or school, a department in a college; a college in an institution; or a separate institution specializing in communication education.

Through such mechanisms, what is considered important in the dominant public university campuses is quickly adopted by communication schools around the nation. In this paper, we will examine two related factors that influence the communication education in the country, namely, the popular resistance to the authoritarian power that is started during the last years of Suharto and continues until today, and the liberalization and expansion of the media industry that is also started during the last years of the Suharto regime and continues until today.

The growing popularity of critical approaches was particularly felt during the second half of the 1990s. Suharto was at the peak of his power, and his repression of alternative voices was responded by underground movements throughout the nation but concentrated mainly around campuses. Students and ex-students formed discussion groups that use the vocabulary of the critical schools to analyze the socio-cultural context and to come up with philosophical and operational strategies of resistance. The overthrow of Suharto in 1998 and the prevalence of the neo-liberalism that follows only convince the academics that the critical schools are relevant for Indonesian media scholars and students. The influential *Jurnal Ikatan Sarjana Komunikasi Indonesia* in April, 1999 was titled "*Menuju Paradigma Baru Penelitian Komunikasi*" (Towards a New Paradigm for Communication Research) with authors from dominant communication schools (ISKI, 1999). It, thus, suggests that the future directions of communication schools in Indonesia should, at least, accommodate more the critical paradigm. If, prior to the fall of Suharto, the socio-political situation resembles the resistance to repressive authoritarian power in Latin America (Rogers, 1982), in the post-Suharto era, the communication research seems to address the hegemony of the neo-liberal market power that works through the expanding media industry.

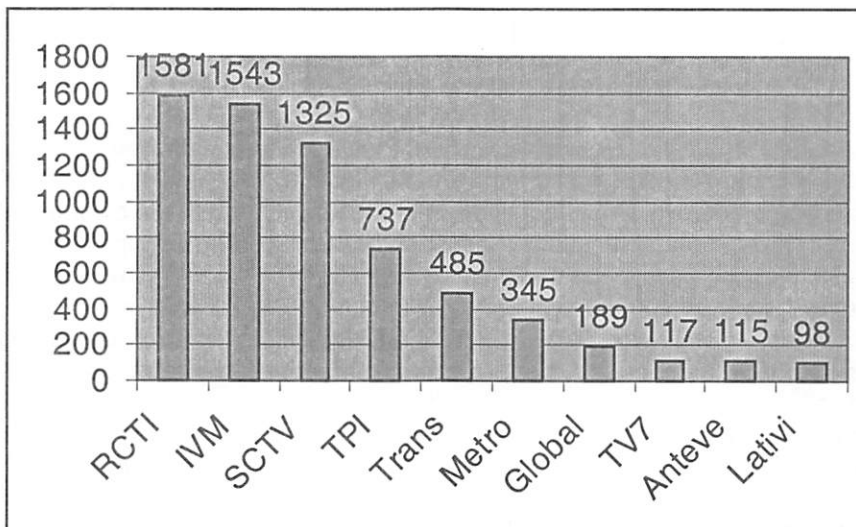
The growth of the media industry started from the late 1980's when the regime, for its own good and profit, liberated the television industry. In 1988, RCTI (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia—that is owned by the First Family—was allowed to broadcast as the first private television station in the country. During the next seven years, another four private stations, Surya Citra Televisi (SCTV), Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (TPI), Cakrawala Andalas Televisi (ANTV), and Indonesiar Visual Mandiri (IVM), started broadcasting. The deregulation also brought about concentration of the advertising market as these five television stations absorbed around 60 percent of the total national advertising expenditures (Hidayat, 2002; PPPI, 1998).

The liberalization and deregulation only accelerate in the post-Suharto era. The liquidation of the Ministry of Information, which was once responsible for controlling the press in the country, was an important national policy that significantly affects the print media. This liquidation followed the revocation of the Information Minister Regulation No. 01/Per/Menper/1984 that required a publishing license for the press. Since then, it is estimated that around 1.200 new printed media and 900 new radio stations have emerged throughout the country. Financially, the media industry and its supporting advertising industry quickly rose back to the level it was before the Asian crisis and Indonesian revolution (see Chart 1).

**Chart 1: Total Advertising Expenditure 1996-2002\* (In billion rupiah)**

Source: *Cakram*, 2002; \*the 2002 amount is a projection.

The last Minister of Information, Yunus Yosfiah, also issued five new television licenses before his ministry was abolished so that the media market expands even more. However, the advertising market is still concentrated on the original set of stations, with RCTI, IVM, and SCTV taking about 4,449 billion rupiahs or almost 70 percent of the advertising expenditure on television (see Chart 2).

**Chart 2: Television Advertising Expenditure in 2002 (In billion rupiah)**

Source: *Cakram*, January, 2003.

Overall, television took 66.4 percent of the total advertising expenditure of the nation, followed by newspaper (28.1 percent), and magazine (5.5 percent) (Cakram, 2003). Along with other factors, such figures push television to be the “prima donna” in the media industry and an attraction to students entering the universities.

**Two Main Trends in Communication Education**

The mushrooming of communication schools—at various levels—in the country is an interesting phenomenon. While it is true that the media and communication industry is undergoing a significant expansion and liberation, the concentration of activities and financial transactions in the capital city of Jakarta makes the industry growth is limited only to Jakarta. Despite this fact, however, as shown in the previous section, communication is still an attractive program to both school managers and potential students. In the nearby city of Bandung, the College of Communication of the University of Padjadjaran since the year of 2000 has to filter 225 prospective students out of about 7000-8000 applicants each year. In the Catholic University of Atma Jaya, Yogyakarta, last academic year, 210 students were admitted out of about 1760 applicants. At the University of Indonesia, the ratio between those who are accepted to those applying has always been very small in the past five years (see Table 3). In fact, the communication program is one of the most competitive in the University of Indonesia. In general, communication schools are being flocked to by potential students respective of their perceived “quality”.

**Table 3: Ratio between Accepted and Applying Students  
In Undergraduate Communication Program in the University of Indonesia**

Year	Applicants	Accepted	Ratio
1998	3229	78	0.024
1999	3243	51	0.016
2000	3622	54	0.015
2001	3751	73	0.019
2002	3969	76	0.019

Source: Academic Administration Bureau, University of Indonesia.

Analyzed more closely, we could see two interesting trends that are shaped by the socio-cultural context of the country and its media industry. The first one, and the more observable one of the two, is the tendency for students to choose mass communication, journalism, or broadcasting over public relations and advertising. The second one, that needs more qualitative analysis to see, is that students continue to be interested in the non-practical, more philosophical communication studies, such as those offered in the critical and cultural traditions. In other words, simultaneously at this juncture within the development of media education in Indonesia, students are attracted to the technical, practical skills of communication and to the theoretical, scholarly works in communication. One could argue that such a contradiction has always been an integral part of the field as has been demonstrated by the debates in the 1983 special issue of the *Journal of Communication* (1983), *Ferment in the Field* (see also Baran & Davis, 2003). Furthermore, the balance between practical materials and theoretical materials has always been an issue among communication educators (see Fedler, Counts, Carey, & Santana, 1998). Nevertheless, the issues certainly demand a careful response from communication school administrators in Indonesia.



**Table 4: Numbers of Applying and Accepted Students to the *Diploma 3* Communication Program in the University of Indonesia**

Study Program	1998		1999		2000		2001		2002	
	Apply	Accept	Apply	Accept	Apply	Accept	Apply	Accept	Apply	Accept
Broadcasting	1107	75	942	118	n.a.	154	2095	156	2600	259
PR	2066	150	1931	220	n.a.	217	1885	166	2066	159
Advertising	915	75	811	110	n.a.	94	1024	80	1270	103

Source: Academic Administration Bureau and Communication D3 Program, University of Indonesia.

To illustrate these trends, data from the University of Indonesia will be used. Table 4 contains data from the *Diploma 3* Program at the University of Indonesia, which is a program that is geared to practical training in communication. Data from the program is being used for it shows that communication is attractive to many prospective students as a practical training program. Moreover, the data demonstrates that over the year broadcast education has become more popular among the students. Looking at the number of applicants, it is shown that by the year of 2001 the Broadcast program has surpassed the Public Relations program as the most popular, while the Advertising program always trails behind.

The second trend—that students are interested in the more scholarly, critical work—is harder to demonstrate and applies more to the undergraduate programs. In the undergraduate communication program in the University of Indonesia, students do not choose their specialization until the second year. When they do, they tend to choose “mass communication” over advertising or public relations. Among the class of 2000, 32 students or almost 60 percent choose mass communication, 14 (25.9%) choose advertising, and 8 (14.8%) choose Public Relations. The next year, 42 students (57.5%) select mass communication as their specialization, 24 (32.9%) choose advertising, and seven (9.6%) choose Public Relations.

It should be noted, however, that in the undergraduate communication education in the University of Indonesia, mass communication constitutes the least practical, more theoretical study program compared to the other two study programs. The bachelor theses written by the graduating students also indicate students’ interest in the scholarly, theoretical works. In the year of 2002, out of the 36 theses written by the students—in addition to other theses that could also be categorized as “scholarly”—ten theses can be categorized as critical or cultural works. They include titles such as “Commodification of Discourses on Sexuality”, “Representation of the Patriarchy Ideology in the Javanese Cultural Hegemony in Television”, “Communication as Emancipatory Praxis”, and “Gender Representation in Movies Made by Women”. In 2001, 12 out of the 29 submitted theses can be classified as critical and/or cultural works. The titles include “The Representation of Homosexuals in Media”, “Critical Discourse Analysis of Advertisements”, and “Representation of Chinese Women in Popular Culture”.

The trend of becoming more critical—not only being theoretical, which could also be empirical—is particularly interesting because, by training, virtually all communication scholars in Indonesia are from the classical, empirical camp. Since its inception in the early 1960s, communication in Indonesia has traditionally been empirical. Starting out as a journalism study, communication quickly turned into an empirical social science in the tradition of

the American schools. The influence of the United States came through training, overseas scholarship, and technical assistance on what was known as development communication. Hence, schools of communication in Indonesia have never been very strong in the training of media professionals nor has it been a camp of the critical school. Therefore, the trend to be more critical can safely be seen as a response to the socio-cultural contexts of the resistance against both the authoritarian power and the market power.

### Closing

At the surface, the booming of communication education in Indonesia might seem simply as a pragmatic response to the expansion of the media industry. Beneath the surface, however, the matter is not so simple. The growth of the communication industry and the prevalence of neo-liberalism might even have urged communication scholars to focus more on the questions about the use of media to maintain power. In other words, “link and match” between education and industry is not the only issue that is significant in communication education in Indonesia.

The students entering communication programs, either at the undergraduate level or the *Diploma 3* level, might be responding to the same phenomenon, namely, the expansion of the communication and media industry. However, once they are in the program, they might react differently to the industry indicators. The more practical students of the *Diploma 3* program prepare themselves to enter the professional workplace while the more theoretical undergraduate students—at least a significant part of them—orient themselves to be critics and scholars of communication. That in the end virtually all graduates work as a professional is, of course, a different matter.

To the lecturers and administrators, the trends pose a resource problem. In order to meet the needs of the society and the industry, they have to do balancing acts on limited resources. Worse, they are not well-equipped to deal with either the professional training (because they are mostly academics) or training in the critical school (as they are mostly trained in the classical school). Until the development of the *Diploma 3* education in communication, in the late 1990s, communication schools did not succeed well in producing media professionals. A study commissioned by the United States International Development Agency in Jakarta in 1999, for instance, concludes that the “universities do not integrate enough practical experience in the curriculum and the professional journalistic degree is almost unheard of in Indonesia” (De Jesus, et al., 1999).

To address both needs, the University of Indonesia recruits professionals and scholars from outside institutions. Its location in the capital city of Jakarta gives it a benefit of access to both the industry professionals and a wide range of academics from research institutions. However, these additional lecturers are not on the tenure track and the stability of their service is not guaranteed. Such a temporary measure can only be used to a certain extent but universities have to decide on their future directions and build their capacity toward those directions. The University of Indonesia, for instance, strives to be a research university. In the future, only academic research and training in communication will be available in the University of Indonesia. More professional and skills training can be delegated to other institutions that are built to provide such trainings.

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