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## Exploring the Future of Communication in India and Beyond: ICA's Regional Conference in Mumbai (/blogpost/1523657/294019/Exploring-the-Future-of-Communication-in-India-and-Beyond--ICA-s-Regional-Conference-in-Mumbai)

Posted By **Tolu Ilupeju**, Thursday, February 1, 2018

Updated: Monday, February 5, 2018

*Colin Agur (U of Minnesota)*

*Chair of the ICA Mobile Communication Interest Group*

For three days in mid-December, Mumbai was the site of an ICA regional conference that brought together scholars from across India and other regions of the world, and highlighted the importance of India as a site for research about media and communication.

Hosted by S.N.D.T. Women's University, this conference marked ICA's first major gathering on the Indian Subcontinent. Befitting the significance of the event, three former ICA Presidents – Ang Peng Hwa, Peter Vorderer, and Francois Heinderyckx – attended and played active roles throughout the conference. Participants came from universities across Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Americas, making this event both distinctly Indian and international. The Mumbai conference followed recent ICA regional conferences (<https://www.icahdq.org/page/affiliated>) in Entebbe (2017), Nairobi (2016), and Kuala Lumpur (2016).

The goal of this conference was threefold: to highlight the significance of media and communication research in India and, to promote new engagement among scholars in attendance, and to continue ICA efforts to build a worldwide community of communication scholars.

The host city provided an exciting backdrop for the gathering. In her welcome message, Prof. Shashikala Wanjari, Vice Chancellor of S.N.D.T. Women's University, drew attention to Mumbai's status as a powerhouse of finance, media, film, and fashion. This was further highlighted by a letter sent to the conference by actor Amitabh Bachchan, emphasizing the changes he has witnessed in media and technology, and the social questions that researchers must consider in the years to come.

The conference program (<https://sndt.ac.in/upcoming-event/2017/ica-asia-regional/programme.htm>) offered a wide-ranging set of discussions about media and communication research in India. For specialists in Indian media and communication, there were sessions discussing the ways different age groups participate on social media, the development of new digital audiences, how children use digital media, public opinion and digital activism, institutional formation and evolution, the changing landscape of media companies, political rhetoric and social change, and changes in the political economy in Indian media.

For scholars interested in comparisons with other countries and regions, there were presentations on topics as varied as Korean pop music, regional identity and representation on mass media, gender in different social and developmental contexts, digital methods in communication and media studies, and future directions in the digital media ecology.

One theme running through these conference sessions was the importance of mobile communication, both as an inescapable feature of contemporary life and as a set of questions for researchers. When researchers discussed social media, digital activism, and interpersonal relations, mobile communication played an outsized role. Questions of norms, ethics, data, user rights, and regulation all inevitably touched on mobile devices, which now number more than a billion in India alone. India has emerged as one of the world's largest markets, a center for innovation in technology and related services, and the site of significant research in how people use mobile phones in their daily lives.

And for scholars of many other communication subfields, India has much to offer as a place to study, learn, and conduct research. It is home to a thriving multilingual media sector, a complex set of social, cultural, and linguistic forces shaping communication norms, and contemporary questions of media governance, access, control, ethics, and transparency. For those who have followed India for some years, this conference provided a welcome update on all manner of communication phenomena and research in the country. For others making their first trip to the country, the ICA regional conference in Mumbai served as an introduction to the rich and lively communication discourse that exists in India, and to the warm welcome that its universities offer visiting scholars.

Thanks to Mira Desai and her organizing team, and to S.N.D.T Women's University and the conference volunteers for making this event happen.



**Tags:** [January-February 2018](#) (?tag=January%20February+2018). (add +)

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