

Communication strategy: Taking research to policy

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IDRC
International Development
Research Centre



CRDI
Centre de recherches pour le
développement international

DFID Department for
International
Development

Why communicate?

What changes can happen if you communicate (your research) well?

- A change in policy
- A change in thinking among decision makers
 - Activating other actors who can affect policy
- A change in the capacity of actors

“Policy Influence”: what is it?

Possible way to think of type(s) of policy influence you want to achieve

Types of Policy Influence (Lindquist)		
<u>Expanding Policy Capacities</u>	<u>Broadening Policy Horizons</u>	<u>Affecting Policy Regimes</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the knowledge or data of certain actors • Supporting recipients to develop innovative ideas • Improving capabilities to communicate ideas • Developing new talent for research and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing policy makers with opportunities for networking or learning within their jurisdiction or with colleagues elsewhere • Introducing new concepts to frame debates, putting ideas on the agenda, or stimulating public debate • Educating researchers and others who take up new positions with a broader understanding of issues • Stimulating quiet dialogue among decision-makers (and among, or with, those involved in knowledge production). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifying existing programs or policies • Leading to the fundamental re-design of programs and policies • Helping create a new policy regime in an emerging field.

Assumption

- Advanced researcher at university or research organization
 - Writing proposals
 - Having some name recognition
- Realize this does not include all
 - But knowing how the game is played by advanced players is useful for others too
- New media discussion relevant to all

**Who do/should you
communicate with?**

Who do you communicate with?

- Government (policy makers/regulators)
- Citizens
- Donors
- Media
- Other researchers
- Private sector
- Others?

Different answers for different projects

Prioritize

- Audiences are not the same for all projects
- Communicating takes resources: time and money
 - Addressing to one audience means less effort on another
 - If you insist all audiences are equal, you will not achieve your objectives

Communication strategy and implementation

Communication Strategy (CS) is a map

- Think of an unmapped jungle
- Is it better to have an inaccurate, incomplete map versus no map?
- How often should you revise the map as you go through the jungle?
 - Or should you blame the jungle for not corresponding to the map?
- Can you postpone entering the jungle until accurate and complete maps become available?
 - Who will make them, if not you?

A map

- Tells you how to get from point A to point B
- Good if it points to things that will help (e.g., sources of drinking water) or hinder (*cave hic dragones*)
- Best if it shows alternative paths and pros and cons

When to get a CS?

- Right at the start
 - Need to think of possible policy impacts and how they can be achieved, when writing the proposal/starting the research

When do you communicate?

- When the results are in
- Before the results are in, but when the time is right
- Opportunism is an essential ingredient
 - Perfect is the enemy of the good
 - Need respond when there is demand for the story, not when you are good and ready

Most important element of CS

- Identify your audience(s)
- If more than one, assign priorities
 - If all are equally important, your campaign unlikely to succeed
 - Doing one thing means, having less resources for other things
- Priority can change over time
 - E.g., first six months senior managers of companies; after that civil-society opinion leaders; some time down the road, academics

Choose method/media based on audience

- If senior private-sector decision-makers are your audience, succinct PowerPoint is the best bet
 - Highest priority must be to get the meetings
 - Certain kinds of conferences (trade events), trade journals and financial press will increase your credibility and reinforce the message (but cannot substitute for the face-to-face)
- Face-to-face and PowerPoint best even for government
 - Again, most difficult task is getting meetings
 - Skeptical about policy briefs being sent cold; useful in the context of a relationship
 - Govt officials also impressed by your presence in certain fora
 - Always leave a document behind (PP or Policy Brief)
- If your audience is the general public, no alternative to TV
 - If opinion-leaders/subset among the public, print may work
 - Radio is the most difficult to work with
 - Having a personal brand (derived through mass media) helps
 - Work on developing personal brands for researchers

Communication

- To key stakeholders or to media: it's story telling
- Better have a single point, or at most 2-3 related points in a story; multiple stories don't work at the same time
- Different stories appeal to different audiences/media; figure out what fits
- Writing news releases give good training in working up narratives, but news releases/conferences less and less effective
 - Targeted dissemination; may need PR consultant in big markets

If you take one thing away from this . .

- Audience is king
 - Identify your audience/interlocutor
 - Empathize with your audience/interlocutor
 - Respect your audience/interlocutor (especially their time)
 - Address your audience's/interlocutor's needs
 - Test everything against the audience

What can we do with new media?

Website

- Essential element of the public face of a project/organization/scholar
- More interactive sites attract more traffic → attractiveness of blogs
 - But blogs are anarchic; not all organizations can run blogs
- Balance between static content and interactive content has to be determined by objectives and audiences
- A powerful mechanism to provide information to audiences when they need it (pull)
- Essential for credibility: If a scholar is invisible on the web, does she really exist?

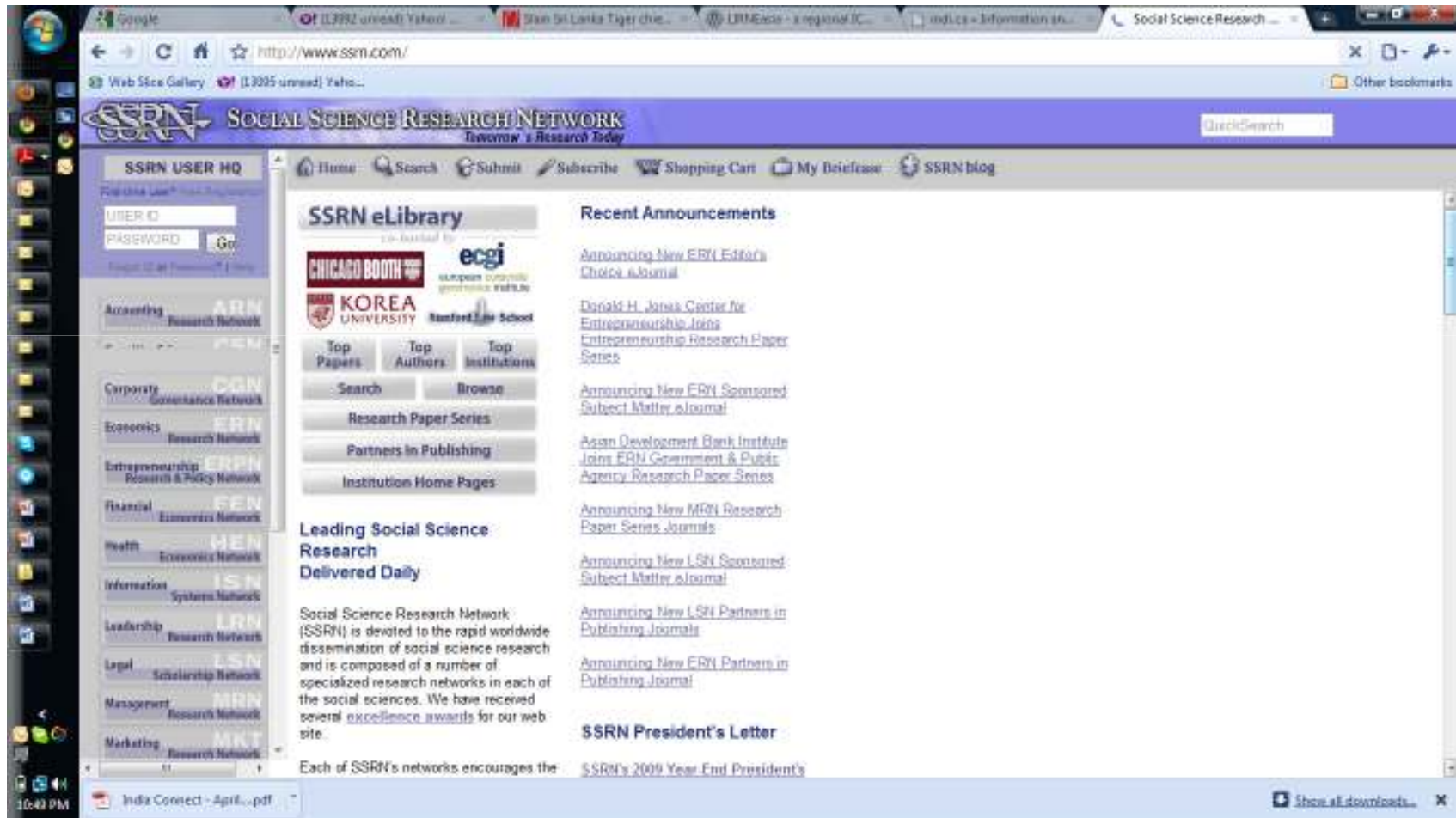
What about web presence?

- Search is the new paradigm: if you can't find an organization through web search, does it exist?
- To provide information on a demand-pull basis to institutional actors, a website is very useful
- Can be a way of advertising yourself to information brokers—important bloggers, journalists, opinion leaders
- Very harmful if you do not have it
- Not necessarily beneficial by itself
- Web work takes time; time that has to be taken from something else

Scholarly paper sites

- Academic publication is problematic
 - Takes too long
 - When published, not on web
 - Some exceptions
- Go for sites such as SSRN
 - Different subject “journals”

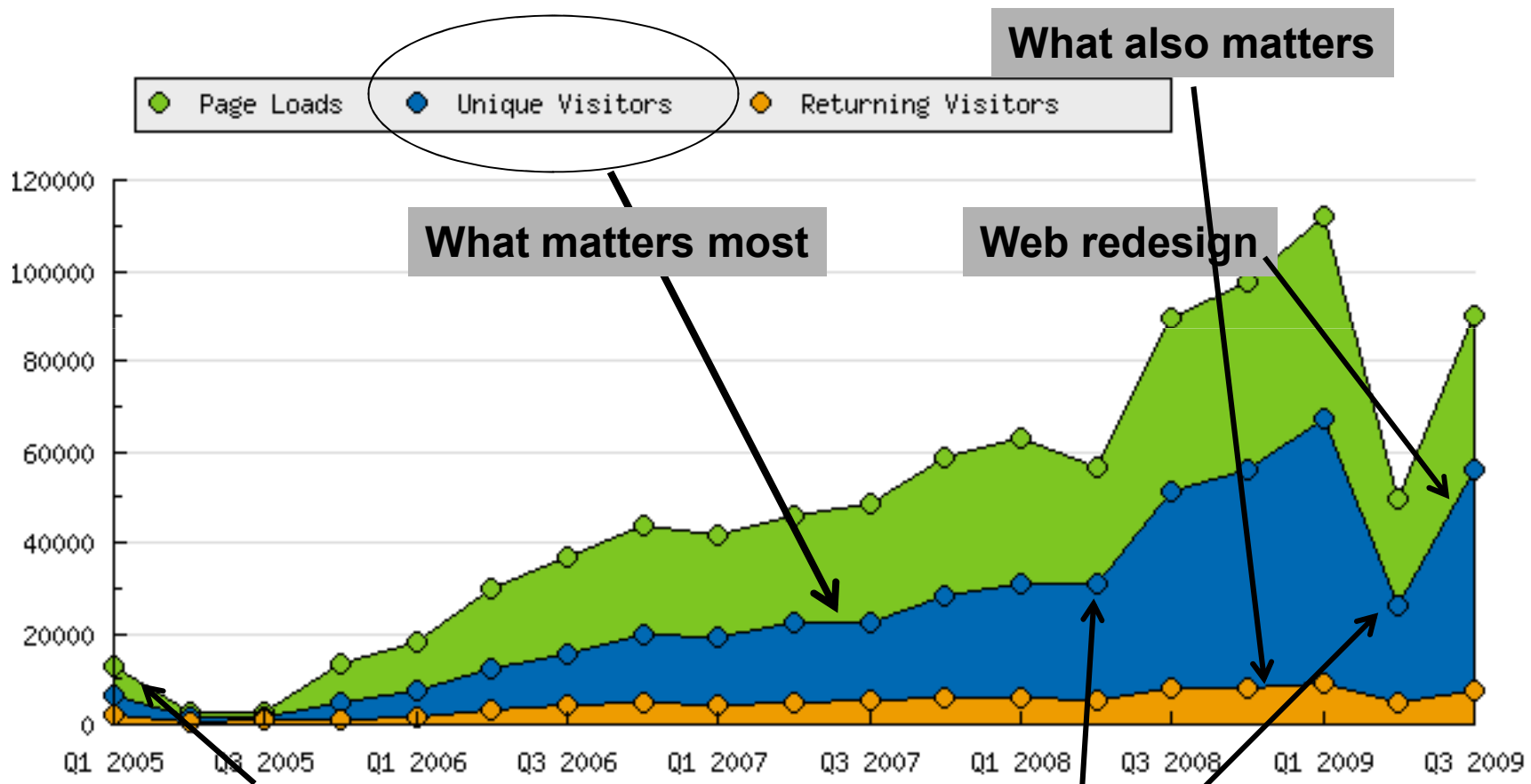
SSRN home page



If you have own site: Don't get hung up on hits

- Look for readers who stay
 - LIRNEasia average is round 2 mts; factoring in the bounce rate, that means that a significant number stay for 4-5 mts
- Are they from among your desired audiences?
 - Raw numbers are meaningless for strategy
 - Google Analytics is indispensable

Traffic on LIRNEasia website, 2005-09



Tsunami spike

What matters most


Web redesign

What also matters

Unexplained 2nd Quarter troughs

Quality v. quantity

- Pages per visit and bounce rate
 - High pages per visit is good
 - Low bounce rate is good
 - Bounce rate newly defined as those leaving from the entry page (1 page only)
 - We reduced our bounce rate by giving only a few lines of our blog entries on the home page, requiring readers to click to second page to read
- Average time on site
 - More is better
- Sept 7-Oct 9, 2009 data from Google Analytics

	Sub Continent	Visits	Pages/Visit	Avg. Time Site	Bounce Rate
1	S. Asia	7,659	3.49	00:02:12	2.05%
2	N. America	2,429	3.08	00:01:23	1.40%
3	N. Europe	1,238	2.84	00:01:24	0.40%
4	SE Asia	977	3.14	00:01:35	1.94%
5	W. Asia	741	2.72	00:00:51	2.02%
6	W. Europe	651	3.08	00:01:05	0.31%
7	Aus NZ	519	2.61	00:00:48	1.54%
8	S. Europe	456	2.76	00:00:57	1.54%
9	 E. Asia	441	3.10	00:01:41	1.13%

Does our web presence meet our needs?

- Focus on Asia, with most work concentrated in S Asia
 - S Asia does well quantitatively and qualitatively, though bounce rate is high (riff raff)
 - SE and East Asia look good qualitatively, though behind N America and N Europe quantitatively
 - Cause for concern re E Asia, which used to be above S Europe and Australia/NZ
 - Not very interested in W Asia, so not unhappy about the low quality of the traffic; lots of visits but short stays

More detail . . . City-level useful for national websites

City	Visits	Pp/Visit	Avg. Time/Site	% New Visits	BounceR
Colombo	4,445	3.54	00:02:07	73.63%	1.96%
London	630	3.03	00:01:58	83.65%	0.32%
(not set)	464	3.38	00:02:39	77.16%	3.45%
Delhi	359	3.63	00:01:53	78.83%	2.23%
Dhaka	339	6.99	00:06:22	59.88%	1.47%
Chennai	336	2.92	00:01:23	83.33%	2.38%
Singapore	271	3.59	00:01:46	68.27%	2.21

Indicates very high interest among a small number of readers in Dhaka: highest time on site, highest pp/visit; lowest new visits %

Wikipedia

- In the old days, it took a researcher decades to be invited to contribute an entry to an encyclopedia, if at all
 - Encyclopedias are about settled knowledge and authority
 - Invitations were rare to those not in the centers of academic networks
- Wikipedia turns it upside down . . . , or does it?
 - Nothing to stop a young Mongolian researcher seeking to write a Wikipedia entry
 - But actually, you may be rejected if you do not proceed with extreme caution

Wikipedia: Stand-alone entries or insertions into pre-existing entries?

- Not a true choice: depends on the subject and what is already in Wikipedia
- Wikipedia has many restrictions against self-promotion

Wikipedia is worth trying for

- Especially advantageous for non-mainstream topics where
 - The current entries do not contain any references to work done in Africa by African researchers
 - Unlike in conventional encyclopedias, Wikipedia has infinite space
- If you get an entry
 - Very high pay off
 - People who read encyclopedia entries want to learn more; primed to read the entries in the reference websites

Facebook, Myspace, Orkut, . . .

- Open to discussion, but . . .
- Best that we can think of is having a presence in social networks that provides links to substantive sites

Youtube

- Significant potential for disseminating videos (short) made for other purposes

Twitter

- Can you reduce your research to short phrases?