
Conference report

THE PAST IS PRESENT: A BRIEF REPORT ON THE 2011 SACOMM CONFERENCE

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More than 170 delegates from throughout South Africa, as well as various delegates and speakers from abroad, attended the annual South African Communication Association (SACOMM) conference. The conference was hosted by the Department of Communication Science of the University of South Africa (Unisa) and took place from 29 August to 1 September 2011 at the Stone Cradle Conference Venue, situated close to the Rietvlei Nature Reserve in Pretoria.

A new addition to the annual conference repertoire was a pre-conference day which comprised two parallel colloquia. The first colloquium, *Towards an African Theory of Communications*, grappled with complex questions surrounding the Africanisation of the communications discipline. The second, *Media, Democracy and Transformation*, dealt particularly with contemporary issues in the South African media landscape – most notably the proposed Media Appeals Tribunal and the Protection of Information Bill. To add richness to the discussion, papers were delivered by academic scholars, industry leaders and civil society representatives.

The main conference consisted of two keynote addresses, various research papers categorised within

the different interest group streams (communication in general, corporate communication, film studies, and media studies and journalism), and the odd academic and industry workshop. Overall, more than 120 research papers were delivered, 19 of which were presented by emerging scholars across the different interest group streams.

The first keynote address was delivered by Prof Anton Harber, Caxton Professor of Journalism at Wits University and *Business Day* columnist. Harber's address focused on two issues, namely how reliable and exclusive private media is when compared to public and even community media; and how the residents of Diepsloot specifically have been failed in terms of the delivery of information by the public broadcaster (the SABC), as well as by the community sector. This address echoed the theme of the conference pithily, whilst juxtaposing it with the changing media landscape in South Africa: the threat of possible restrictive legislation in terms of media and academic freedom in the near future.

The second keynote address was delivered by Prof Pieter Fourie, the previous Chair (1987-2004) of and a Professor in the Department of Communication Science

at Unisa. Fourie's address mainly challenged scholars to rethink and return to theoretical foundations in their teaching and research. He made a strong plea for scholars to return to phenomenological communication research, specifically with the four constructs of signification, dialogue, rhetoric and representation in mind. Fourie also contended that the lack of phenomenological theory and research is one of the primary reasons why communication science is still not regarded as highly as it should be as an academic discipline.

In addition to all the research papers delivered, there were also the traditional SACOMM book launches. The first book launch took place during the informal cocktail dinner and showcased authors Prof Keyan Tomaselli and Dr Colin Chasi's title, namely *Development and Public Health Communication* (Pearson Publishers). The second book launch, sponsored by Juta Publishers, took place during lunch on the second day of the main conference. The author, Prof Nathalie Hyde-Clarke, introduced the title *Communication and Media Ethics in South Africa* to the audience.

In terms of the Management Committee of SACOMM, Julie Reid was elected as the Vice-President of SACOMM for 2012-2013 and Dr Michelle Tager is to take over as President of SACOMM for 2012-2013 from Prof Lynette Fourie.

Looking to 2012, the SACOMM Conference will be paired up with the 2012 International Association Media and Communications Research (IAMCR) conference, to be held in Durban in July 2012. The theme of the conference is *South-North Conversations* and it is expected that more than 1,000 delegates from around the world will attend. It will be the first time that the IAMCR conference will be held in sub-Saharan Africa and it is thus

a feather in the cap for SACOMM and the University of KwaZulu-Natal, the organisations that made the successful bid to host this prestigious event.

- For a complete list of speakers and presentation titles, please go to:
http://www.sacomm.org.za/docs/SACOMM_Programme_FINAL.pdf.
- Speakers' research paper abstracts can also be viewed at:
http://www.sacomm.org.za/docs/SACOMM_Abstracts.pdf.