



# Analysis of regulatory systems of broadcasting and telecommunications: A comparative study focusing on Korea and the United States



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## ABSTRACT

This study compares the historical formation of regulatory systems for broadcasting and telecommunications between Korea and the United States. In particular, we analyze various metaphors about telecommunications and broadcasting and which metaphors and discourses have been adopted in the social context. We further examine how such metaphors and discourses contributed to different regulatory philosophies and regulatory systems in Korea and the United States with a focus on comparative historical analysis. Analysis shows that regulatory philosophy and the framework of telecommunications and broadcasting were constructed in different historical contexts in both countries. The perception that communication technologies are public resources was pervasive in the U.S., but in Korea, the function of broadcasting was recognized as a means of government control or dissemination of propaganda implemented under Japanese colonial authorities and the rule of the U.S. military government. How these different social/historical contexts led to different regulatory philosophies and systems in the U.S. and Korea is discussed.

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## 1. Introduction

The convergence of communication technologies, including telecommunications and broadcasting, has been an important subject in information and communication. Although previous studies have examined many issues about media convergence such as the nature of the services, consumers' usage of convergent services, and other issues related to network access, ownership, content, and so forth (e.g., Blackman, 1998; Hills and Michalis, 2000; Koh and Lee, 2010; Wu, 2004), there has been little historical analysis of what kinds of metaphors have been produced and adopted to describe the emerging media technologies in a given society and how such epistemological perceptions (i.e., metaphors about communication technologies) influenced the formation of regulatory regimes.

In the United States, although broadcasting and telecommunications were developed in separate forms, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulatory agency has taken charge of both (Coase, 1959; Robinson, 1978). On the other hand, Korea has considered them separate media and has controlled them through different regulatory authorities. This may be because broadcasting and telecommunications have been perceived differently in the different societies. Thus, it

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is necessary to understand how such different regulatory systems, especially epistemological frameworks of media technologies in a given society, have been constructed in different social contexts.

This study historically analyzes how the differing regulatory systems have been socially constructed in Korea and the United States. In particular, the current research aims to understand the different underlying mechanisms which resulted in the different regulation systems in Korea and the United States. Acknowledging that metaphors play a significant role in setting up attributes of certain technologies and shaping how we perceive such technologies (Gozzi, 1999), we investigate what kinds of metaphors delineating newly emerging media have been selected and adopted and what social contexts influenced the formation of regulation systems in both countries.

The findings of this study will help to better understand the relationships between media and society (i.e., the process of internalization and utilization of media in and by society) by investigating how metaphors representing the media have been produced, selected, and utilized. In particular, the focus will be on how a newly emerging cognitive framework in the advent of broadcasting and telecommunications technologies has been reflected in the composition of different regulatory philosophies and organizations in both Korea and the U.S. Investigating the influences of various recognition frames of emerging media on the construction of regulatory philosophies can make it possible to offer implications for media policy in accordance with the convergence of media technologies.

In sum, the purpose of this article is to explain the reason that Korea has separately supervised and controlled telecommunications and broadcasting while the United States has governed them both through the FCC. To do this, this study examines which factors play an important role in establishing the status of media among a variety of metaphors used to symbolize discourse with respect to electronic communication media, including communication via telegraph, telephone, and radio in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of special interest are which metaphors were created in which context when broadcasting and telecommunications were emerging. This paper reviews the historical situation and the social contexts to examine which metaphors depicting electronic communication media have been selected in each society, what reasons led to their selection, and how the production and utilization of the cognitive framework (i.e., metaphors or discourses regarding certain technologies) contributes to different regulatory philosophies and organizations of regulatory authorities in Korea and the United States.

For that purpose, we collected and analyzed references (e.g., newspapers and magazines) that contain metaphors for broadcasting and telecommunications when these communication technologies emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, secondary literature analysis was implemented to examine various historical situations and social contexts that were associated with the formations of regulatory systems. A variety of discourse or metaphors regarding the media technologies were categorized, and then we analyzed the historical and social contexts under which certain metaphors have been selected, utilized, and ultimately reflected in the formation of regulatory philosophies and regimes in both Korea and the U.S. To that end, we discuss the social, cultural and historical backgrounds of different regulatory systems in both Korea and the United States as well as the relationships between communication technologies and society.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. *The social construction of technology and empirical programme of relativism*

The social construction of technology (SCOT) approach proposed by Pinch and Bijker (1987) has helped to explain how social actors and structures can influence the development of technologies (Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1985; McGinn, 1991; Williams and Edge, 1996). SCOT links research on the sociology of technologies with insights from the empirical programme of relativism (EPOR), a sociological approach that has demonstrated the social construction of scientific knowledge (Klein and Kleinman, 2002). According to the EPOR and SCOT approaches, there are three stages in which a consensus of scientific findings emerge (Collins, 1981; Pinch and Bijker, 1987). The first is interpretative flexibility. In this stage, scientific findings (new media technologies for the purpose of this study) are open to various interpretations among social groups such as scientists and policy makers (Collins, 1981). In other words, there would be different interpretations of technological artifacts in a society rather than just one possible way of designing an artifact. This means that there is flexibility in how people interpret artifacts as well as in how artifacts are designed (Pinch and Bijker, 1987).

The second stage concerns the mapping of mechanisms for the closure of debate or for the stabilization of an artifact. The SCOT approach explains that when various interpretations about an artifact exist, controversies over the meaning of an artifact follow (Klein and Kleinman, 2002; Pinch and Bijker, 1987). Closure can be made after experiencing these controversies in a society. According to Pinch and Bijker (1987), closure in technology involves “the stabilization of an artifact and the disappearance of problems” (p. 44). A technological controversy is closed when the relevant social groups consider the problem as being resolved.

The third stage, the wider context, is to relate the closure mechanisms of a technological artifact to the wider social and political situation. The wider sociocultural and political milieu of social groups shapes its norms and values, which in turn influence the meaning and development of an artifact (Pinch and Bijker, 1987). This stage emphasizes that the wider sociocultural and political milieu needs to be taken into consideration when it comes to understanding how technological artifacts are developed in a given society (see e.g., Kim, 1994; Klein and Kleinman, 2002).

Accordingly, the usefulness of the SCOT and EPOR is that they provide an analytical framework to better understand the relationship between scientific knowledge, or artifacts, and broader social processes by elucidating the closure mechanisms

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