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Country Paper -
Socio Economic Impact Of Broadcast Satellite

By

Madzni Johari
COUNTRY PAPER
THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BROADCASTING SATELLITES

BY:
MADZHI JOHARI
DIRECTOR IPTAR MALAYSIA

SEMINAR ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BROADCAST SATELLITES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION
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THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BROADCASTING SATELLITES

INTRODUCTION

BASICALLY broadcasting satellites are repeater stations moving in geo-stationary orbits about 23,000 miles (36,000 KM) above the earth. There are many types of satellites; however, for the purpose of this discussion only two types will be referred, viz communications and direct broadcast satellite.

Communication satellites, as the name implies, relay signals from various destinations around the world whose main purpose is for telephony. With a broadband channels as an added feature, they can also be used for broadcasting.

DBS or Direct Broadcast Satellites are built solely for the transmission of broadcast programs. These being high power satellite, can convey broadcast programmes directly to the home-viewers. What a home-viewer needs is only a parabolic dish and a consumer-type of receiving equipment which are readily available and affordable.

Satellites have been widely accepted as a mode of transmission for television and radio programmes in countries where they have been previously found to be uneconomical to provide complete terrestrial coverage due to their unsuitable
geographical terrain. In advance countries this technology has been further exploited for commercial benefits, the case in point being Cable TV networks.

Without a doubt, satellite communication offers viewers a better choice in the selection of programmes. Previously expensive terrestrial networks set up for a purpose of programme transmission can now be replaced by a multi-channel DBS. While there are many advantages brought about by this new technologies, one should also be wary of its negative aspects. Hence, this paper attempts to highlight these aspects in the Malaysian context.

SCOPE

This paper does not intend to dwell on the technicalities of the new mode of communication. Thus, it does not discuss the system of satellite communications: the propagation of signals, the allocation of airtime and frequencies, and other technical aspects of this technology.

This paper will only discuss the impact, or probable impact, of broadcasting satellites on Malaysia and the Malaysians; namely - the social impact on national ideology, education, culture, securities, commercials and economic aspect.
The discussion is on professional level, because the writer is not a social scientist who had done massive research on this subject. The following discussion is the result of professional anxiety and anticipation of the new technology. Thus, the paper will not forward a model nor discuss an existing model in the discussion.

OVERVIEW

Malaysia enters the age of satellite communications when an earth satellite station was built in 1970 in Kuantan to receive and transmit programmes. It receives foreign live programmes to be rebroadcast to local viewers. These are mainly sports programmes. The earth station also transmits local live programmes overseas, mainly to South East Asian and Middle-East countries. The programmes are mainly sports (such as Thomas Cup) and Quran reading competitions. The second earth station was built in 1977 in Alor Gajah. Presently, the Kuantan Earth Station is tuned to Palapa Satellite and the other is to Intelsat Satellite.

In 1969, a TVRO Complex (KOMSAR) was commissioned. The complex comprising three parabolic antennas and a switching station is located at the Radio and Television Broadcasting Complex (Angkasapuri). This complex receives programmes all over the world and rebroadcast selective programmes over the two networks of RTM. Presently, local
viewers are restricted from direct access into the satellites. The use of parabolic antenna is being controlled by the Government and there is no indication that it will be relaxed in the near future.

SOCIAL IMPACT

A communication expert, Daniel Lerner, as far back as twenty years ago had said that new public communication would increase new interest articulation, new socialization, new political recruitment and new interest aggregation. Finally, the new interest aggregation would affect new public communication. Thus, the process would continue in an everlasting circle. Lerner started with new public communication. Therefore, if there is additional input in the communication life of a society, there is corresponding increase in other elements of modernization. It is safe to deduce here that communication access has an impact on the social life of a society.

In the paper, it is already stated that the use of broadcasting satellite, especially direct broadcasting satellite, will, in theory at least, offers wider selection of broadcasting programmes to viewers. Coupling this with the theory of modernization expounded by Lerner, greater exposition means greater modernization. However, we have a vital questions to address here: is the access desirable? We
are developing countries with traditional norms and values which are often in contradiction with norms and values of the developed countries. Therefore, direct access to broadcasting satellites means direct import of norms and values of the developed countries and will result in stress and conflict in our society.

IDEOLOGY

Idealogy is a guide upon which a nation finds direction in and achieve objectives of its national development. The emphasis is on freedom: freedom of speech, association, movement, choice and others. All nations will put democracy as the paramount ideology. We, however, perceived and practised freedom of choice and democracy differently. Our perception and practice are not similar to that of the developed countries.

In Malaysia we have a social ideology called Rukunegara. It is the guide for social interaction. Though there is no national communication policy presently, the social ideology is the guiding factor which should be adhered to by by media practitioners. There are five principles in Rukunegara. They are:

(a) Belief in God.
(b) Loyalty to King and Country.
(c) Upholding the Constitution.

(d) Rule of Law.

(e) Good Behaviour and Morality.

In Malaysia, we have three TV networks and not less than 10 radio networks to inform, educate and entertain the populace. Unfortunately, only 80 percent of our population can be reached by TV and only 60 to 70 percent via radio broadcast. It is undeniable fact that pocket areas could have been reduced through the use of broadcast satellite. Microwave repeater stations could have been built to cover the pocket areas. However, the population in the pocket areas are so sparsely distributed, the increase in number of microwave stations does not justify the cost.

It is true that in the concept of freedom of information, these people should be provided with information that would help them improve their standard of living. The reality is, however, to make information accessible to them will cut into a large portion of our national development budget. Secondly, since they are sparsely distributed, building earth stations to relay broadcast from the centre would be prohibitive too.

If we look at one side of the coin, developing countries can tap into rich broadcast programmes via the satellites. Cost of producing programmes could be saved for
other purposes. However, the programmes retransmitted by the satellites are aimed at commercial viewers in the originating countries. The picture on the other side of the coin is, therefore, more alarming than promising.

Now, let us spend some time viewing the aspirations, blatant or subtled, of superpowers. It is important to view them because they are the powers that can easily send up broadcast satellites orbiting directly above our heads. We have no sanctuaries to offset the effect of these communication fallouts.

It is the trend now that developed countries want to impose their brand of freedom of choice and democracy on other countries. The events in Russian Baltic states and China recently, regardless of our views and stand, clearly demonstrated the desire of ideological intervention by a superpowers on small or weak nations. This is not a new trend. However, with the advent of satellite technology, the reach of superpowers will be greater.

We are now confronted with the spectre of superpower intervention. And, the fact now is that these superpowers have communication satellites orbiting the earth. They have the capability of sending more communication or broadcasting satellites in orbit. Therefore, they are able to disseminate their ideologies to any society they desire. Those poor
developing countries have no capability to send satellites to combat those ideologies. Some may argue that by allowing access those superpowers would not be able to educate the masses in their ideologies because the masses do not have the means to receive those messages intended for them. Can we be sure?

Malaysian social ideology, Rukunegara, is meant to build a united Malaysian nation. As long as Rukunegara is adhered to and as long as it is not questioned, the prospect of peaceful coexistence can be assured. This does not mean subjugating the people to a foreign ideology. Rukunegara was drawn up as aftermath of racial riot of 1969. It was drawn up by a council whose members were drawn from various ethnic groups. It has been proven that Rukunegara is a valid and viable guide for racial harmony and integration.

Therefore, free access to broadcast satellite is not the answer in widening broadcast coverage in Malaysia. The freedom of accessibility will bring more chaos to the country than the rise in the standard of living.

FLOW OF INFORMATION

When we talk about the flow of information, we would like to differentiate the flow of information within a country and the flow of information between countries. With
the advent of satellite technology, the flow of information in the global village is very much faster than that of the pre-satellite age. In Malaysia, the use of Satellite Complex (Komsar) and the fact that Kuala Lumpur is hot switching centre of Asiavision had enabled RTM to receive visual stories from many parts of the world, the same day as the news/documentaries broadcast by the original stations. Some of these materials are used by RTM for broadcast, especially CNN visual news is broadcast daily.

In terms of information flow within a country, we envisage a bigger broadcast coverage area by using broadcast satellites. The information would be able to expose the populace to the national aspirations. When they are more informed about the steps taken to improve their standard of living, they will participate in the national projects carried out by the government. We are trying, with substantial success, to bring the aborigines (Orang Asli) into the mainstream of national development. They are now more willing to live in settlements built for them. By having settlements, their children are able to go to schools. They practise permanent cultivation besides gathering and selling jungle produce for hard cash.

If we have the means to reach the Penans in the depth of Sarawak jungle we may be able to help settle them. Though it is difficult to successfully settle them presently, the
may be able to be transmitted to the younger generation. They then would be more receptive to the idea if they are convinced that a settled life is better than a nomadic one. The problem here is money. We need a lot of money to build earth stations (assuming we can rent a line from an existing satellite) which may not be viable as the Penans and other nomadic tribes are so sparsely distributed.

Again, it is "immoral" not to provide Penans and the likes with information to uplift their standard of living. The actual question to be address here is not a mere moral question but also financial viability of any information projects. The cost of making information accessible to them is very prohibitive when we take into consideration the other needs of development.

Let us take a look at information "imports". We have already said that RTM airs "Jendela Dunia" daily. It is an edited version of CNN broadcast. What do we found out?

We are still confronted with ethical and moral questions. News perspective of "Jendela Dunia" (Window on the World), which is the edited version of One Hour With CNN, is still an American viewpoint. Indirectly, we propagate editorial perspective of the programme. The audience is, therefore, more American orientated in various global issues. Malaysia, as an independent country, at times has conflicting
views with the United States on various issues at international forums. Here, we have "Jendela Dunia" expounding American perspective in those issues. How can we have two conflicting views existing at the same time? Though we subscribe to the concept of free market place of ideas, the situation where Malaysia's stand on certain issue is not supported by or at times in conflict with the editorial content of "Jendela Dunia" is unattainable. On the question of the plight of the Palestinians, is an example. Malaysia condemns genocide carried out by the Tel Aviv regime, but the content in the "Jendela Dunia" does not say anything about the genocide. However, it highlights the attack on the Tel Aviv military by unarmed intifida supporters.

What we have here is two conflicting signals prevailing in the local mass media. Information originating locally would discuss the Malaysia's stand on the issue, whereas foreign news would talk cover the same issue from different point of view. This dilemma is not exclusively Malaysian problem. Other developing countries too may be facing the same situation. Though we may say that more information would enable our audience to make a wiser decision, it is doubtful whether this type of exposure is desirable in the long term.

We have been talking about free flow of information and new world information order. When we talk about them we
have print media in our mind as the vehicle of news exchange. When we talk about them we have disparity of coverage between developed and developing countries in the developed world. The news from developing world are normally disaster news or news which have been tailored to suit developing countries' audience. Until now, the question is not finally resolved. This is due to the fact that world news are collected and distributed by news agencies in the developed countries.

As it is, there is disparity of coverage. We have been trying to make inroad into western media. We want audience of the western media to understand us. Our efforts have been futile. Now, if and when we adopt satellite communication we are at a more disadvantaged position. As we have earlier said that we do not have the control of satellite communication. It is therefore unfortunate that gap will grow bigger and our hope to bridge up the disparity of coverage will become and everlasting dream.

We are not pessimistic when we say this. It is, however, vital for us to think about the future. The hope of establishing free market place of ideas will die. It is because the market place be inundated with ideas from the developed countries. The audience of the developing countries will become consumers of those ideas. History will repeat itself. Communicators from the developed countries will produce ideas to be consumed by the communicators of the (12)
developing world. Should we cherish the idea of becoming consumers from consumers of economic goods to consumers of ideas forever?

Apart from producing ideas, the owners of media of communication may canalize public opinion. Canalization effect of media can be seen from the way media in the developing countries try to influence consumers in the developing countries. Nowadays we can still see distorted stories of the developing countries in the western media. The western media try to impose their world views on the audience in the developing countries. They will support dissent by locals towards their governments. The subtlety of their approach is amazing. They will support a dissident group (normally in minority) and start blowing an incident to merit a front page story.

They will label a dissenting group as "freedom fighters". Like-wise they will label a government who is against the group as "oppressive", "undemocratic", "fascist" an others. What they are actually doing is canalizing public opinion: soliciting sympathy for one group of people while calling for denouncement of the establishment. The owners of the press and news agencies, fortunately, do not have broadcast satellites over our heads. If, while having only print media, they are already very ambitious, we dread to think when they own broadcast satellites.
Therefore, the use of broadcast satellites is beneficial marginally, but in the long run, it will be very costly in terms of nation building.

**EDUCATION**

The discussion of education here encompassed formal and informal education. In Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM - University of Science, Malaysia) conducts distant learning. There is on the air for some time now of an idea of distant learning tailored to the University of The Air of the United Kingdom. Radio 1 had carried the programmes of USM Off-Campus lessons over the air. Radio 1 had since stopped airing the programmes.

The advent of broadcasting satellite would be a boon to distant learning, provided owning countries have similar programmes on the air. Programmes aired over satellite could be from different levels of education. They may be primary school, secondary or tertiary level of lessons. Though primary education is free in Malaysia, there are still some children who are not able to go to schools due to the distance from schools (some communities are so isolated that the journey to school will take a few hours of walking) or terrain of their habitat (some communities are only accessible by two or three hours' journey by boat).
It is important that all population of a country know the projects and programmes undertaken by the government to uplift their standard of living. It is also important they understand them and participate in them. In order to achieve the objectives, these people have to be educated. However, to be able to educate them, they must be exposed to the media. If electronic media which transcends literacy and geographical barriers are not fully capable to reach them, the hope to integrate them into the mainstream of development is but only a dream.

Therefore, in this context, direct broadcasting satellite is very desirable. There are a number of questions, however, to be addressed to here before this costly endavour can be implemented. Firstly can they afford to buy the antenna and a receiver? Secondly, do they need them? Thirdly, are they not cumbersome to a nomadic society? If ever any governments are able to provide their nomadic tribesmen with such gadgets, the projects will become white elephants in no time.

Informal education is meant to upgrade the ability of an indi-vidual to live in his surrounding. In theory, he can learn from various develop-ment programmes. In addition to local produced programmes, he is able to learn better methods of farming from other land, if he is a farmer. If he has no access to electronic media, the use of broadcast satellite is
undoubtedly very useful. In reality, how much can he learn? Firstly, the language used in foreign programmes is totally Greek to him. Secondly, the farmer portrayed in the programmes may not be planting rice, cloves, cocoa and other crops which are familiar to him. Those programmes could help him, if they are edited and translated to him and broadcast through broadcast satellite.

Thus, the use of broadcast satellites for education is very limited. It is limited by the cost of building infrastructure, the content of programmes and the ability of audience to identify themselves with the actors in the programmes. No doubt that the limitation can be overcome by using local materials and disseminating them through the use of direct broadcast satellites, the cost of renting line for the communication is still prohibitive to be considered by a country which has different priorities.

CULTURE

The process of nation building could be further enhanced if the populace could identify themselves with symbols of the national culture. There must be core norms and values. The norms and values must be inculcated so that they can be revered. The process calls for knowledge, understanding, and acceptance. Broadcast satellites can help disseminate the information further than through using
conventional methods. However, the problem is still the same: whether it viable to use satellite communications to reach sparsely distributed population.

Broadcasting materials retransmitted via satellites is beneficial in terms of types and numbers of programmes accessible to the audience. By broadcasting those programmes the audience is kept abreast with development in the field of science, arts and music. After being exposed to styles and contents of foreign programmes they will be able to offer suggestions to improve locally produced programmes. The many choice of programmes can satisfy diversified tastes of our audience.

On the other side of the coin, the exposure to foreign programmes will hamper nation building. The exposure to foreign culture will inevitably create false world view in our audience. Their perception of modernity will come from the pictures in the small screen. To them flashy and fast cars, expensive dining, cute legged girls are sign of success. This false world view will challenge the logics and sensibility of Rukunegara.

The fifth tenet of Rukunegara (Good Behaviour and Morality) which says – Good behaviour also includes a high standard of morality in both our personal and public life – is incongruous to what is seen on the small screen. The
small screen shows street killing, murder, rape, co-
habitation, bed scenes and others. These are the immorality
which Rukunegara asks the populace to refrain from. Can they
refrain from those activities when day in day out they see
them in their living room. They will see, try and adopt
those immoral behaviour as they think that it is not unusual
anymore, or just for aping the west.

The influence of broadcasting satellites can be
watered down if the programmes taken from them are edited
before being broadcast. If they are received direct from
DBS, we have a real problem. The values of the west will be
in open market to the audience. The consumers will then,
over time, built up world view which is incongruous to our
national culture. When the majority of the audience say that
norms and values enshrined in the Rukunegara are outdated,
then there will be social chaos.

Therefore, when we try to balance up the pros and cons'
of broadcast satellites, we find that they will have adverse
effects to our society. The impact will be great, because it
opens floodgates of polluted ideologies, norms and values to
the audience.
ECONOMIC IMPACT

THERE is certainly an impact on economy of a country when satellites are used in communication. Information can be transmitted faster and more precise. Thus, communication via satellites will link a country's economic centre to other economic centres in the world. The link is important so that international trade can be executed in a more efficient manner.

At the moment, international communication is done through conventional means and the use of satellites. The satellites used are communication satellites that carry both channels for telephones, telex, facsimile and the likes, and channels for broadcast programmes. It undeniable that communication via satellites has improved trade, banking and securities transactions.

The improvement in trade, banking and securities activities in a country will create job opportunities to local workforce. In Malaysia, the improvement in communication infrastructure, inter alia, has drawn in substantial investments. These investments have helped to create jobs for the labour market. It has, thus, kept down unemployment to about 7 percent. This low figure is not solely contributed by satellite communication, but it is one of the contributary factors.
If we go by experience of other countries, like Indonesia, the use of satellites for communication has opened up job opportunities to the local workforce. Job opportunities are created for the building of satellite infrastructures. Besides, there are also jobs for the workforce in the operation and maintenance of the infrastructure. The size of job opportunities would be substantial if we have to build a large number of earth stations to rebroadcast programmes.

The present operation of communication satellites in the business world is not similar to DBS. Signals are retransmitted from satellites to earth stations which in turn rechannel them to various points via conventional channels. Business world is not in dire need of DBS presently because they only need information to be sent and received speedily and accurately. Thus, if they were able to receive influx information while they need to use a small portion of it, there would be a waste.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that communication satellites play an important role in the economic activities of Malaysia. The speed and accuracy of
communication they offer have made Malaysia an attractive investment centre. However, what is needed by the business world is not broadcast satellites which is solely meant for broadcasting purposes.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that the use of satellites in communication has made an impact in the socio-economic life of Malaysians. Without the use of satellites Asiavision project will not be feasible. The gathering and the dissemination of visual news are done via satellites. This has contributed to better understanding amongst Asian nations. The proposed Islamvision project will also need the use of satellites for the gathering and dissemination of visual news.

The use of satellites to receive broadcast programmes from foreign countries is prevalent in Malaysia. We receive sports programmes, like the recent World Cup, and the saying of prayers and other religious activities from Saudi Arabia through satellites. It is so much so that foreign live programmes has become household agendas in Malaysian homes. The expectation that those programmes to be broadcast live in Malaysia also is great. There was an incident when 1982, RTM was not able to finance live broadcast of World Cup from Spain, the people of Malaysia contributed to a fund to
finance the cost of bringing the soccer event into Malaysian homes. This also is sufficient to illustrate the impact of satellites to Malaysian society.

However, we are still having reservation to the introduction of DBS. This is due to the fact that by directly exposing our audience to foreign programmes content our efforts in nation building may be hampered. We believe in democracy and the freedom of choice. However, democracy and freedom of choice have some limitations. We do not want democracy and freedom of choice to be turned into destructive factor that will destroy the fabric of our society.

DBS with no supervision at all will enable superpowers to impose their way of thinking and action to the people of the world. With present trend where superpowers are imposing thier views and actions to the weak and small nations we think that our reservation is justified. We do not loath modernization and technological advancement, but we prefer modernization and technological advancement to suit the needs and requirements of our nation building.