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The Use Of Traditional Media In Development Communication

By

Ina R Mariani
I. Development Communication

The apprehension of development communication till this present time is a debatable matter among communication experts. However, in this particular paper development communication means supportive of adherence communication for developments, which is the form of communication that aims to give information on development of the transfer of new ideas (innovation) towards society, so that they may understand and be motivated to participate in the development itself. Thus, the function of communication is really an adherence for development.

To be able to function, communication must observe the realities of life. Development communication must work hard to support sustainable development, starting first with efforts to sell the new ideas within the development community (Dahlan, 1987).

On innovation, Rogers views that development of an innovation is the process of putting new ideas in a form that is expected to meet the needs of an audience of potential adopters. Rogers goes on to say that all innovations carry some degree of uncertainty for the individual, who is typically unsure of new ideas and thus, feels a need for social reinforcement of his/her attitudes towards the new ideas (Rogers, 1983). Such
reinforcement can be attained through persuasive communication.

Such is congruent to the opinion of the Minister of State for Population, Emil Salim, that development can be attained through efforts such as persuasion (Oepen, 1988).

Rogers goes on to say that innovation is a time consuming process. It demands years for a new idea to spread and be understood by a society. The purpose for research on diffusion is to condense those years. Once established, an innovation will have consequences, either functional or disfunctional, direct or indirect, manifest or latent. Of course, the agents of change hope for effect that are functional, direct or manifest (Rogers, 1983).

Diffusion of innovation is dependent upon 4 elements which are innovation, the communication, the channels and the time. An innovation is any new idea in a social system. The perceived newness of the idea is what counts, not its objective newness (Littlejohn, 1989).

Presently, Indonesia is actively expanding to achieve a society which is developed in politics, economics and the social field. Because the nation is moving towards modernizing the volume of information accessible is astounding though its quality is still questionable. For the population in the city and the villagers trying to respond to the ever changing world, the wider the scope for the information and its "authority" would cause great tension between the sources of traditional information and
sources of modern information (Oepen, 1988).

This is one of the problems faced by Indonesia. The villagers are flooded with information from various sources. All parties, the businessmen, the leaders, sponsors, mass media, government officials who are field guidance/counsellors, all representing their personal interests, try to spread information as much as possible. In due cause, the hierarchy structure in this country needs to be scrutinized in depth in terms of theory and practise. We need surveys to acknowledge how far the policies are influenced by the attitudes and means of information (Dahlan in Oepen, 1988).

In order to increase the pace of development, especially in terms to increase and exalt society's participation in the development, information and social communication holds an important factor. Development will succeed if supported by communication systems that are applicable and within normal growth.

Knowing the important role of information and social communications there comes the necessity to draw a strategy, an informations policy and construct a social communications that is effectively usable for the increase to perform the development (Rachmadi in Oepen, 1988).

It is no longer questionable on the important part that mass media acts upon as a means for reform to the nation. Plenty of research has been done, specifically western nations, on mass media's role that contributes to the development of the nation.
Print media as well as electronic media. Mass media not only functions as an education and entertaining instrument, but also, acts as a consultant.

However, one must not ignore that in many developing countries and much more in underdeveloped nations, there still exist societies that have not felt the privileges of mass media. The causes may range from to the unaccessibility towards that media, to obstacles such as illiteracy. For such societies mentioned above, the role that mass media has can be replaced by opinion leaders or even, what is known as folk art performances.

II. The Role of Traditional Media

In Indonesia various cultural arts can be found. Among the arts, many folk art performances can be categorised as traditional communication media. The reason being is that in those performances not only entertainment is involved but also messages or advices so that people can attain a healthy life, in honestly, for a peaceful world.

Judging from the Indonesian background whose majority is identified by a rural attitude and character, it is understandable why the traditional performance media has a large part in communication development, which is easily accepted and digested by rural society. Traditional performance media helps fill the gaps (that are difficult to bring together by) that are otherwise difficult to load through direct communication between formal or informal leaders. Messages on education, agriculture, health, family planning program, etc, which are transferred
through a familiar media is easily absorbed. One that is already
known and corresponding to the cultural values, so that the
society does not feel pressured or forced in accepting the
information (Rachmadi, 1988). Such can be viewed as informal
education which indirectly educates people without them being
conscious of it.

Education through communication is significant because as a
consequence of communication itself, one acquires the rules, maps
and images, and associations which direct his/her behaviour in
any given situation. Whether he/she's aware of it or not his/her
maps and rules tell him/her what to say or do, when to say or do
it, how to act in this and that circumstance, how to tell one
kind of circumstance from another, what to pay attention to and
what to ignore, what to value or despise, what sort of people to
seek out and which to avoid, what and who to believe, and so on.
Our images are our means for navigating about in our symbolic and
physical environment and the basis for our functioning as human
beings (Ruben, 1984).

Traditional media is a communication infrastructure that is
characteristically traditional. Traditional because the media is
an infrastructure within a culture and a certain area. As such,
traditional media has existed long before the present development
mass media. Traditional media usually stresses the cultural or
artistic aspects due to the fact that it accommodates and forms in
the composition of the society involved (Sulistyani, 1983).
The traditional predicate can be understood as everything that is in accordance to tradition, the patterns, forms and repeated use in the terms as heritage from generation to generation. Tradition though, does not mean closing possibilities to insert messages on development. According to Van Peursen, tradition is something that is unchangeable but can be combined with the acts of the human being. For it is mankind who created tradition. Due to this reasoning, messages transferred can be accompanied with society's evolution (Handoko, 1976).

Openness on the part of these messages reflect that traditional media holds a heterogeneity element in transferring messages.

Another character on traditional media is that it maintains a high homophili degree, meaning: between the communicator (artists) and the communicated (audience, spectators) there are values and habits that are relatively the same because traditional media stems from the culture involved. The homophili stages between the communicator and the communicated also influences how messages are transferred and the content of the messages sent by the traditional media to the audience. Coming from the same cultural background, the messages sent by the traditional media is adaptable to the audience's need.

High homophili stages also created an exceptional credibility for the traditional media among its spectators (Sulistyani, 1983)
Messages transferred through traditional media usually excavates local habits which illustrate daily life, attitude patterns, and reactions towards those daily life. Other than that, communication attempts to bring the audience towards a broader way of thinking (cosmopolite). This situation, psychologically and socially, can grow not only the high degree of homophili between the communicator and the communicated, but also grow a group bond that is increasingly stronger (Krech, 1962).

Traditional media also contains mithology, that is tales that give guidance towards a group of people. The main point of those tales are symbols which spark the mankind's experience historically. Its transfer is usually brought through the symbolic expressions, either verbally or non-verbally (Sulistyani, 1983).

III. The Traditional Media, "Wayang"

As mentioned before, in Indonesia there exists much folk performances that can be categorised as traditional media communication. However, this paper will focus its attention on one kind of media, the "Wayang". Specifically, the "Wayang Kulit", a flat puppet made from leather. There are other types of wayang. One, is the "wayang golek", a three dimensional wooden puppet in traditional costumes. The other is the wayang that is performed by human beings or wayang artists.
Wayang is a traditional media that is most favorable among the Javanese society, particularly Central Java. Such preferences enormous enough that, though they (the Javanese) might migrate to another island, the wayang performance goes along with them.

The "wayang kulit" is performed or motioned by a man called the Dalang. He gives movements to the leather puppets behind a screen that is situated in front of an audience. What the audience receive are actual shadows from these puppets, due to the dark surroundings. Similar to a situation in a cinema.

The Dalang motions the leather puppets while giving narration and voices to each puppet that appears. A different voice to every different puppet. One should notice that for every wayang performance there is only one dalang surrounded by and occasionally accompanied by traditional musical instruments: the gamelan. The narration emerges between the songs and melodies in each specific section.

One character from the wayang is its performances are an expression of respect towards is ancestors. Therefore it is sacred. It is sacred because in it are religious ceremonies, such as the harvest ceremonies, the circumcision ceremony, etc. Ceremonies that involve the life of human beings.

However, because humans are apt for the abilities and techniques that are dictated through a healthy mind, then he is also characteristically profane. It may be related to daily
activities but still attached to the sacred world (Onghokham, 1982).

Wayang is not only a performance but it illustrates the abstract world where form and fantasy becomes reality. Although it displays tales of kings and knights such as Pandawa and Korawa or Rawa and Shinta from the tale of Ramayana, the infinite struggle between right and wrong, fair and unfairness (Mangoendipuro, 1978).

Even though there are enormous changes in the social, political, and cultural field of the last decades, wayang still exists as a medium for the infinitive relation between man and his world. Wayang has lasted through the monarchy downfalls of the past, lasted though Islam entered and became the majority faith, and maintained its popularity until this present time, even after the 350 years of colonialization of the Western World (Department of Data and Information, 1975).

According to the Javanese, wayang is not only entertainment, but also an internal wealth that contains the process of educating oneself.

IV. The Wayang's Contribution to Development.

In reality, wayang is a cultural sector that lives and has vitality. Having force to expand in society and able to act as a communication in relation to the dynamics of change and developments.
Entertaining elements in the wayang performance usually involves songs popular to the public audience, using techniques that move the wayang gestures lively, using jokes that are a magnite to the audience, told through the Punakawan. All this entertainment can cause an exciting reaction. With the warm response from the audience, new ideas can be effectively communicated in part-taking the messages in certain parts of the entertainment (Mangoendipuro, 1978).

It's a shame that not enough research has been done in the traditional communication media, especially wayang. The limits on its effectibility in transferring messages for development are still unknown. Research done by the Department of Data and Information collaborating with the University of Gajah Mada these last few years have shown that traditional performances do not have the actual substances as hoped. The problem might be caused by the minimum use of traditional media as an information infrastructure. Though supposedly, if one was to use wayang as a medium of information for development, the communication process might have a good opportunity. Especially, when the medium used is a familiar one that would make the communication process simple.
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