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Conservation Of Energy Through Mass Communication

By

Awang Had Salleh
&
Hamidah Karim
CONSERVATION OF ENERGY THROUGH MASS COMMUNICATION

by

Prof. Dato' Dr. Awang Had Salleh

and

Hamidah Karim

This paper was presented at the International Energy Conference on August 26-28, 1980, at Kuala Lumpur Hilton.

The authors would like to submit it as a contributory paper for this seminar on "Communicating Issues of the '80s: Challenge and Response" as it bears direct relevance to the issue on ENVIRONMENTALISM.
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SYNOPSIS

In this paper headed "Conservation of Energy through Mass Communication", the primary focus will be firstly, to delineate the nature, scope and functions of the media vis-a-vis the energy conservation issue and secondly, to bring about greater awareness on the part of the energy specialist in how to best utilise the media in helping further the conservation cause.

Essentially, there exists a communication gap between energy specialists and media people. A gap that could be bridged if energy specialists could:

* grasp the thinking of the media especially the Press and care for their response and interaction

* create a more "unscientific" climate and access for the media to very scientific information, and

* treat the issue as part and parcel of development communication which is a current preoccupation especially for Third World Media today.

Until and unless the above key factors are fulfilled, the energy conservation issue will continue to be a lonely campaign for energy specialists the world over.
INTRODUCTION:

The authors at the very outset regard the reporting of the energy crisis and seeking solutions to it as a major issue in development communication, a topic and trend which has been occupying the attention of communication specialists for some time. Development in the true sense is only complete if it includes a process of change not just of material or physical things but also of opinions, attitudes and values.

The authors feel that "development communicators" can no longer play the passive observers' stand if development efforts are to be effectively harnessed.

In adopting this approach, the authors shall review the structure and foundation of the mass media, discuss the Press in the region and, hopefully, shed some light on why media practitioners are described as agents of change and development.

This paper will also emphasise the need for a systematic method of communicating information to the media and, finally, illustrate the interdependence of media to effect change.
Structure and Functions of the Mass Media:

The mass media cannot be separated from society and studied as if they had an independent existence. The mass media play vital roles in our contemporary society and must be seen as part of the social fabric of the nation and as a force that influences the shape of its patterns.

The more is studied about the operation of the mass media in Malaysia and also abroad, the more the authors tend to agree with the opinion of the "cultural anthropology school" - placing emphasis strongly on the concept that all mass media, any newspaper, any television operation, any magazine must serve the need of society if it is to survive.

Climate, environment, religion, economic factors - all of these and others - help make up the character of the society and the character of the society in turn influences and has a bearing on the nature of the mass media.

The mass media have been described by some writers as essentially an extension of the function of the individual communicator - but with the functions being performed in a public manner rather than private. Certainly many of the functions which man traditionally has conducted by private communication have been turned over in some degree to the mass media.

One simple approach to describing the functions of the mass media has been to state that it has four basic or primary missions:

1. To inform
2. To interpret
3. To crusade
4. To entertain

The Press serves as the first rough draft of history. Newspapers may preserve or strengthen our language. Good or poor thinking and writing in newspapers have a much wider impact than other sources of communication.

The authors feel too that the Press must attempt to relate the community to the world, to bring meaning along with the week's events.

We in Malaysia believe that it is a function of the newspaper to promote community harmony rather than discord. It is a function of the Press to provide "selectivity" for the people. Radio and TV have their own roles in our lives, but only the printed word can give selectivity to the busy man or woman.

If a person has 20 minutes free he can glean more of the information that he wants from a newspaper, book, or magazine than two hours devoted to the electronic media.
In addition, the authors also feel that the media must perform the function of giving perspective. The newspaper reader is bombarded with many facts by the various mass media, and the newspaper should assist in bringing the total picture into perspective.

One of the most important means of accomplishing these several functions is through the editorial page. The editorial page has the mission to convey to the readers informed interpretation of the news and reasoned opinion about the news.

The masses today need a good deal more than their superficial acquaintance with the chronological series of facts. They need real understanding, and more than the mere recitation of a succession of happenings.

A great percentage of the space devoted to editorials is concerned with examining some public problem, some problem that presents a conflict of competing public or social interests. The newspaper attempts to analyze the competing interests for the reader and to determine the policy the newspaper conceives to be in the best public interest and for the general welfare.
Press in the Region:

Some documents issued by the Press Foundation of Asia (PFA) indicate quite strongly that the specialists are constantly criticising the Press in Asia for having failed to reach a level of adequacy in performing the role expected of it in the development process whether brought about by the energy crisis or not.

Complaints from PFA officials have been centred around the lack of enlightened coverage from the mass media. This lack, they say, "constitutes a stumbling block to socio-economic progress." 1

The authors venture to suggest that the basis of the criticism centres on the way the Press treats the story of development. There appears to be a certain inability on the part of the media to explain to the masses not only the need for energy conservation but to pinpoint the culprit behind the derailing of so many development projects.

The Press Foundation of Asia believes the media has failed to understand its dynamic role in changing societies. It seems unable to explain to the masses all the implications of change and the disciplines they entail.

This failing has given rise to a two-fold communication gap. First, there is a gap between those involved in the gigantic efforts of development (the planners, academicians, administrators, technocrats) and the newspapers. Second, the gap between the mass media and the public.

The worst sufferers of this communication gap are the public opinion leaders. They are at a loss to find that the mass enthusiasm which swept Asia into the era of national independence not so long ago, cannot be harnessed for conserving energy, which you will agree is an important aspect of national development.

The Press which plays such a crucial role in moulding public opinion has been put on the spot for such a failure. It has been accused by certain everoters of being lukewarm in telling the dramatic energy story accurately and interestingly. The work 'interestingly' is stressed so that the masses can be involved as powerful human stimulants to the development process. This failure has resulted in a public apathetic towards all disciplines of development, let alone efforts to conserve energy.

Undoubtedly, this communication gap is one of the major challenges of development in Asia. Bridging this gap is a task which calls for the development of a new breed of journalists. People who will be able to supply the needed linkage.

This new school of writers will have to be trained in the language of a new discipline, one which combines knowledge of new ideas and concepts from a variety of disciplines related to development which will include economics, sociology, psychology, political science and research methods.

These writers will imbibe new writing techniques that hopefully will result in newspaper stories that are not only highly readable but investigative, substantial - and stimulating. And they will increase the ranks of Asia's development journalists.

CRITICISING the Press is one thing. But what about people like us who so often point a finger at the media. Are we doing anything to bridge the gap between ourselves and the journalist? Do we really spend time to brief journalists on the finer points relating to the energy situation? Do we supply them with sufficient background material and up-date them with latest developments?

Is the flow of information to the media sustained? Have we ever found out how the Press is responding to the issue of energy conservation?

In the industrialised world the initiative to learn comes from the Press. The journalist makes it his business to learn. In the connection we would like to quote from TIME Magazine, the issue of June 9, 1980. It reads:

"One of the privileges of journalism is the license to learn from people who know and exercising that license can take many forms. Periodically the editors of TIME conclude that a particular complex issue or problem can best be plumbed by inviting the best and brightest minds from a number of callings to sit around a table and bounce-pass ideas to one another. Facts are shared, opinions are ventilated, brains are stormed and much coffee is consumed. The result is almost always that rarest and most vital of transmutations: information becomes knowledge, as editors, writers, reporters, researchers and correspondents find that they have acquired a fast education on an issue - and often a major story for the magazine."  

Gentlemen: what is most striking in that passage is the phrase: A fast education on an issue. A great deal of our criticism about which way the media is going would be ended if we can find experts with time to spend with journalists and give them a fast education on the energy crisis from time to time.

Since this is lacking in this part of the world, we suggest the experts if they are interested in getting their message across accurately and meaningfully should take the initiative and meet the media.

Issue Perspective in Development Communication:

If energy specialists agree that development implies desirable changes in the thinking and doing of the people, then conservation of energy is indeed part of the massive development process, and should rightly come under the spectrum of development communication. We invariably take into account the totality of the individual. We cannot isolate one problem of an individual's life from his overall problems.

Much of the writing on the conservation of energy in the region is, to say the least, piecemeal and undertaken by non-specialists. One senior communicator likened it to the description of an elephant by seven blind men. But the elephant could not be an elephant if the description of the seven blind men were not pooled together.

On the other hand – and this is unfortunate – if an article were produced by an expert it normally is beyond the comprehension of the layman.

Since development communication or, more specifically, the campaign for the conservation of energy, stems from participation of the masses, it must have these ingredients:

1. A sense of active participation,
2. A sense of pride in evolving solutions to the problems,
3. A sense of achievement.

Theory and Practice:

In order to get through to the masses, theoreticians and practitioners are often at loggerheads. They find it hard to realize the importance of each other in fostering the cause of the discipline they belong to, and often, communication scholars and practitioners find themselves in the same situation. However, you will agree that it is difficult to think of a theory without any practice and vice-versa.

The noted psychologist, Kurt Lewin is on record as having said: "There is nothing so practical as a good theory. But the practitioners' apathy and negative attitudes towards theory have emerged perhaps from their exposure to poor theories over a long period of time and a basic misunderstanding about the meaning and ramification of theory. The theory which can serve the cause of communication is best endowed with all the practical attributes. The merit of a theory has to be judged not from its applicability at the individual (personal) level alone, but at the society and community levels as well." 4

International communicator - Harold Lasswell described an act of communication as: 5

WHO says WHAT in WHICH channel to WHOM WITH WHAT effect?

This is commonly referred to as the Five W's model. The relationship between theory and practice through the five W's can be explained also in terms of control analysis, content analysis, media analysis, audience analysis and effect analysis.

WHO refers to all those engaged in the act of communication day in and day out. The effectiveness of a communicator depends on an interaction of such factors as his cultural compatibility, language compatibility, command over the message, credibility as a communicator as perceived by the people, his attitude towards the message and skill in handling the channel.

WHAT is central to all that goes on in the communication process. Communicators in general and mass media practitioners in particular are said to be elite-oriented, perhaps mainly because the bulk of their message caters to handful of the total population. This concern is echoed mostly in the Third World countries due to the wide differences between the rich and poor.

But whether it is elite or non-elite, your message has to be compatible and the language used has to be understood well by the people concerned. Besides, it should be simple and to start with should not call for too many changes on the part of the people.

WHICH (channel)... Mass media, especially radio and TV, because of the speed with which they can cover the length and breadth of a country, are playing a significant role in creating an awareness and interest among its audience. But the interpersonal communications channels (friends, neighbours, leaders and others) are more effective in convincing and ultimately leading one to act upon a message.

TO WHOM... In any communications failure, communicators are the first victims. What has gone wrong, they ask themselves. Therefore, it is always good to subject oneself to introspection and self-evaluation. In this context we would like to ask: How often have we stopped to consider that a slight increase in attentiveness of the audience in reading, listening or viewing can go a long way in increasing communication effectiveness?

Here we would suggest that we get away from the oft-repeated concept of: "How well have we communicated?" to "How well is the response?"

In getting the energy message across, this knowledge and feedback is vital. After all, it is through research findings that we know that no two individuals behave in the same fashion despite their similarity in age, experience and socio-economic background. This has helped us to realise that differences in knowledge and attitude of people have a direct bearing on the nature and quality of response.

WITH WHAT EFFECT... The acid test of communicating through the media is in the nature and quality of response by the receiver and the intensity of satisfaction by the communicator. This effectiveness is the result of an interplay of all the components of communication, namely, WHO, WHAT, WHICH (channel) and WHOM.

Today, more than ever before, we have to know "who talks back?", "who responds and why?", "how to make the two-way process meaningful; "how to pitch the message to the level of understanding of the receiver", and so on.
Media Practitioners as Agents of Change:

This section looks at media practitioners as agents of change. Journalists, broadcasters, advertising people right round the world live from one deadline to another. This pre-occupation is on speed, accuracy, details and objectivity. The journalist might spend a day chasing shadows or a few minutes picking up very useful information and spending sleepless nights wondering what to do with it. He is concerned with libel suits, checking and cross-checking every bit of information.

Privately-owned newspapers must be able to sell in order to stay in business. They can do this by running stories highlighting human oddity and pandering to the sensational. Some may prefer to describe at some length every detail of a sex murder than report the plight of farmers, let alone explain facts of the energy crisis. More often than not, reporters are expected to sustain the visibility of their newspaper by writing circulation-boosting stories to attract advertisers.

The growth of the print media in this business world of ours has given the profession certain characteristics that have time and again been seriously questioned. And since mass media practice and theories have come from the more affluent and industrialised West and continue to be influenced by them to a large extent, the role of the media practitioner, whether in the West or in the Third World, has remained more or less similar.

But events have shown that mass media organisations in most developing countries have been made to exercise certain constraints and to conform to certain prescribed standards of practice. As a result, they are very different from their counterparts in the West.

Indications are that media in the region have been and indeed, still are, going through a period of transition. This transition, it is hoped, will give these organisations and practitioners newer and more meaningful dimensions.

With that background the authors would like to look at the concept of media practitioners as change agents. As you are aware, they have been described as "watchdogs", "information gatekeepers", "opinion leaders" and "persuaders". But more seriously, "change agents."

If you look at them as change agents, an entirely new and wide dimension of activity is opened. It implies direct links with the people. It also means that certain value systems both in the content and style of print and broadcast journalism have to be changed to meet the more urgent demands of development which today includes the energy crisis.
Having given them this new role it is now important to look at some of the factors inhibiting the effectiveness of communicators in the developing countries—more especially in Asia. These may be viewed from three angles:

1. the viewpoint of communication infrastructure
2. the viewpoint of the audience, and
3. the viewpoint of the communicator and his message.

It must be appreciated that there is a gap between what modern communication technology can offer and what in fact are the possibilities in Asia to absorb such technology. Satellite communication has brought about "instant globalism." What takes place in one corner of the world may now be seen by millions throughout the world.

As one international communications expert put it: "The earth has suddenly been given an 'electronic coating'."

By the year 2000, communication technology will have advanced to such an unbelievable extent that even major conferences may be held via two-way television with delegates sitting and talking in two or three cities of the world "together" at the same time.

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Communicating Scientific Information:

Extracts of proceedings from a recent international seminar discussed the question of communicating scientific information to the media. The seminar identified the strategy for communicating science for development and strongly recommended that research in and development of appropriate technology should be institutionalised in developing countries.

At the same time it was recognised that the development strategy of the future must be allowed to vary. Each country and society had to be allowed to define its own goals and ways of reaching these goals.

The strategy these experts recommended was to focus on a systematic, methodical exposure of the general public to the reasoning of science. Certainly not a flash in the pan kind of effort.

The seminar also identified some "priority areas" for the communication of science. You will be glad to note that the conservation of energy was one of them.

Another noteworthy point was that experts could play a significant role in the popularisation of scientific subjects by speaking, writing and disseminating information about their projects and its relevance and usefulness to the people. Such dissemination should be made in language and terminology which can be readily understood by all.

The seminar also recommended that science information centres be set up for the layman and should be easily accessible to those who need scientific information.

Finally, the seminar recommended training programmes designed for science communicators. Science graduates with a flair and aptitude for communication work should be recruited and trained in journalism. There is scope for the introduction of special newspaper columns devoted to science in general and energy in particular.

At the moment the question of setting up an Association for Science Communication is being given serious consideration by some communicators.

8. This seminar was sponsored by UNESCO - AMIC and COSTED - the Committee of Science and Technology in developing countries. The authors have drawn on some of its findings for this section of the paper.
Media Interdependence:

Conceptually, to increase the exposure of the public to a new idea, communication sources should be combined in order to achieve desirable changes in the behaviour complex.

And as a means to change behaviour, communication can be described as a process of information, decision and action. The real test of behaviour change – to get people to think energy – lies in the action part of an individual. We can refer to this action as adoption, which is viewed as a mental process of thinking and doing and consists of various stages.

Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre (AMIC) points out various research findings which indicate differential effectiveness of communication channels at different stages of the adoption process. One such investigation gives these findings:

First, we deal with the adoption stage, followed by the influencing media. The need to change is evident when an individual wishes to change his existing practices. The influencing media in this context was the change agent and to some extent, the mass media.

This is followed by the awareness stage where the individual comes to know about an innovation without knowing its details. The influencing media in this context was again the change agent and mass media.

Next, Interest: Here he makes an attempt to know more about the innovation. The influencing media: Formal sources such as extension agency and others.

Then, Deliberation: This is the stage of deliberation and mental evaluation. The influencing media: Informal personal sources including family members.

Next, Trial: Here an individual uses an innovation in part or sometimes in full. The influencing media: Family members, friends and neighbours.

Then we have Evaluation: At this stage the individual evaluates the performance of the innovation. Influencing media: Friends and neighbours.

Finally, Adoption: It is a decision to use the idea on a continued basis. Influencing media: Self experience gained at the trial stage.

The Adoption and Influencing Media Guide

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<td>I. Awareness</td>
<td>Change Agent</td>
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<td>(of innovation generally)</td>
<td>Mass Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>II. Interest</td>
<td>Formal sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>(to know more details</td>
<td>External Agencies, Others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>about innovation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>III. Deliberation</td>
<td>Informal interpersonal sources e.g.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(mental evaluation</td>
<td>family members)</td>
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<tr>
<td>of innovation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>IV. Trial</td>
<td>Interpersonal sources:</td>
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<tr>
<td>(using innovation in</td>
<td>family members, friends, neighbours.</td>
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<tr>
<td>part or in full)</td>
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<td>V. Evaluation</td>
<td>Interpersonal sources</td>
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<td>(assesses performance of</td>
<td>Friends, neighbours.</td>
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<td>innovation.)</td>
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<td>VI. Adoption</td>
<td>Self-experience</td>
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<td>(decision to use</td>
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<td>innovation continually)</td>
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This leads us to the theory that no single communication medium can, by trial, change the behaviour complex of a people. There has to be a very active interdependence of different media by way of playing supplementary and complementary roles.

An individual or a society needs a number of exposures to different communication sources in order to arrive at a desired decision to use and adopt ideas. Hence a combination of communication media is far superior to any single communication medium of bringing about desired change.
CONCLUSION:

Ladies and gentlemen: Whether we are politicians, businessmen, environmentalists or private citizens, we all have access to the media. Some people form advocacy groups or associations and appoint spokesmen to talk to the media. If this be the case, the spokesman must familiarise himself with the media. He must know the key people in a newspaper, TV or radio station. He must follow the news daily to look at opportunities for outlet. He must cultivate reporters who are interested in his cause. When appropriate he should call a Press conference for maximum exposure.

But Press conference or no, what is important is individual contact with reporters, the news editors and, if possible, the editor. Have tea with reporters in your office. Introduce them to your colleagues. Make them feel your office or organisation is open to them. If a reporter is bright he will find his own stories. You should also give him 'tips' or 'leads' (to stories). Give him a sense of participation in your cause.

Also, find local angles to foreign developments and pass these on to your newspaper contacts. Act like you are the eyes and ears of the Press. Do not be shy to have your photograph in the Press. Give your organisation a face.

Do not overlook the smaller newspapers and magazines. The editors of these journals are normally short of interesting material. They need you as much as you need them.

And do not be discouraged if your usual newspaper contact disappears suddenly. (The turn-over of journalists today is rather high.) You will have to keep on briefing new reporters as they show up.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, just six words of advice to end this paper: "You have to push for coverage."
References and Readings:

AMIc journals and reports: Media Asia and Asian Mass Communication Bulletin published by Asian Mass Communication Research and Information Centre.


