

**The Social And Cultural Effects Of Satellite Communication  
On The Indonesian Society**

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**THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EFFECTS OF  
SATELLITE COMMUNICATION ON  
THE INDONESIAN SOCIETY**

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**SEMINAR ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF  
BROADCAST SATELLITES IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION  
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SELO SOEMARDJAN

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL EFFECTS OF  
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DONESIAN SOCIETY.

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Indonesia is one of the less developed countries in the world which has boldly decided to purchase and utilize a satellite, the Palapa, in its drive for modernization. That decision entailed a great leap forward in the country's process of development, particularly in the field of mass and telecommunication. The spread and development of the radio, television, telephone and its inseparable partner, the facsimile have been profoundly stimulated by the Palapa which started its operation in the middle of the 1970's.

For the purposes of mass communication development the Palapa gives its services through the Department of Information which handles matters of radio and television. With regard to telecommunications the Department of Tourism, Postal services and Telecommunication makes an extensive use of the satellite.

Now that the Palapa satellite has been continuously in operation for some fifteen years its effects are discernable to those who care to make a comparison between before and after Palapa in the social structure and the culture of the Indonesian population. To obtain a comprehensive picture of the social and cultural implications resulting from the use of the satellite it is advisable to trace them from the operation of the three major technological devices which find its present source of power in the satellite. Those three devices are the radio, television and the telephone.

A cursory study of the social and cultural effects from the three communication implements on the Indonesian population will soon reveal that there is not only one general effect, but there . . .

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but there are a diversity and in some respects even controversial effects. This is mainly due to the astonishingly great diversity of social structures and cultures in the Indonesian society at large.

In order to properly understand the satellite influences on the people of Indonesia one should take a little time to look at the social and cultural components of that population.

Indonesia is politically one country with one nation, speaking one national language and having one national government working under one constitution. That is the unitary side of the coin.

The other side shows a sociological and cultural diversity. The country holds together a little more than 17.000 small and big islands, some with an extremely dense population of almost 1000 per KM2 and others with a density of no more than 3.

The 180.000.000 people consist of between 400 and 500 ethnic groups, each with its own customs, family system and language. No dialect, but language. An estimated 16.000.000 live in big and modern cities, 60.000.000 in small towns, 100.000.000 in agricultural rural areas and some 4.000.000 are scattered in the jungles. Modern urban communities enjoy the use of electric, electronic and motorized utensils in their daily life. There are, however, jungle tribes who at present still literally live in the stone age. In between those two cultural poles live a population varying degrees of adat (all encompassing tradition) and modernity. An overestimated 25% of the population have electric power, if not in their homes, then at least in their habitat.

For purposes of simplicity we will call the modern urban and small town community just urban communities, those living in the agricultural rural areas rural communities and the tribes in the jungles jungle communities.

In their .....

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In their ability to receive and absorb satellite using telecommunications and broadcasts the three types of communities are equipped with different characteristics. Urban communities have full use of electric power in public life and in their homes, they are literate with a relatively high degree of college graduates, they live primarily from manufacturing and service industries, and they are achievement and future oriented in their way of life.

Rural communities have electric power only in a limited number of their villages; literacy is enjoyed only by the younger generation; their primary source of living is agriculture which is for more than half of them subsistent in nature, while their life orientation is concerned with the present.

Jungle communities are not familiar with electric power, they are completely illiterate, they live from food collecting and are satisfied if they have gathered enough food for the day.

Before we try to make an assessment of the socio-cultural impact of satellite supported telecommunication and broadcasts it may have some use to know a few technical details of the human absorption capacity of incoming information. This may help in understanding the impact differences of different media on communities. We quote from Reinhard Kassler : Communication for Mult Educators, published by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2nd edition 1988, page 18 :

A. " A normal and healthy person with all senses properly working will receive out of total information permanently collected proportionally :

about 75 % by sight,  
about 15 % by hearing,  
about 4 % by touch,  
3 % by each, smell and taste.

B. Not all . . . . .

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B. Not all information is retained in our LTM (long term memory).....  
After a lapse of days the memory (in a number of tests) was able to produce part of the information depending on how many senses were employed:

about 20 % of what we have only heard  
about 30 % of what we have only seen  
about 50 % of what we have heard and seen,  
about 75 % of what we have heard, seen and discuss,  
about 90 % of what we have actually been doing".

From quotation A we are only interested in the reception of information by sight and by hearing. Information by "sight" in this paper can be translated into "by television", while information by "hearing" is only another way of saying through "radio and telephone". Another factor, not included in Kassler's individual reception tests, but influential on collective reception are speed of information distribution and repetition of broadcasts. The two factors, especially when combined, can prevent the rise of rumours which frequently takes place when people have to wait a rather long time for important information which may or definitely effect their interest. The faster the information is distributed (through broadcasting) the less chances there are for rumours to develop. The more frequent an information is presented the larger the proportion of that information is absorbed by the audience. And very often with sharper accuracy.

If we mix quotation A and B we observe that hearing only has a low effect ( A 15% and B 20%), seeing gives higher effect ( A 75 % and B 30 %), while seeing and hearing combined produce a cumulative and therefore a much higher effect. In terms of mass media we may say that television watching and listening has a higher reception effect than radio listening.

#### EFFECTS OF TELECOMMUNICATION AND BROADCASTS ON URBAN COMMUNITIES.

Urban communities in Indonesia like those in any other part of the world enjoy the use of the latest technology available in the

country .....

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country. This applies also in the field of telecommunication and broadcasts through radio and television.

Before the Palapa satellite a telephone customer in Jakarta had to wait for hours to get a domestic long distance connection. Even local calls within the city limits very frequently tapped on the users' patience because of frustratingly time consuming connections. It was very often faster to jump into a car and drive to the other party rather than to meet with him through the telephone. This inadequacy of the telephone service may primarily be due to the shortage of telephones as compared with the rapidly growing demand which caused an overload of telephone calls, but the technically ignorant telephone user was only aware of the faster and more satisfactory service after the Palapa was put to use. Local calls became more convenient, clear and fast. Faster than the car in the ever increasing traffic congestions in the streets. Local calls and overseas connections could be established with speed and satisfaction. One no longer had to count in hours, but only in minutes to get a long distance or an overseas connection established. All within the paying power of the average businessman. Telephone communication, only oral by its very nature, is now modernly supplemented with facsimile or fax for written documents.

Instant oral and written person to person communication, spanning all parts of the globe, has been stunningly helpful in establishing a fast working nationwide network with all its advantages for government and business. The next step which has subsequently run ahead is globalizing that network to include all cities and countries which use the same high-technology telecommunication devices.

Those in the modern urban communities in Indonesia, engaged in international business, are now members of the global community. Their orientation goes for a larger part to foreign markets and foreign financial resources and only for a relatively small part to the millions of pre-modern population in our rural areas.

While this ..

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While this global orientation is observably strong in the higher classes of the urban business community, it is also reflected in the wider circles of radio listeners and television watchers. Since the inauguration of television in Indonesia in 1962, people tend to prefer television watching above radio-listening. This tendency is understandable in the light of Kassler's test findings above.

The radio with receivers so inexpensive that they can be purchased from a school boy's daily allowance is still popular in the homes of lower middle and lower class people who cannot afford to buy more expensive television sets. The wealthier upper middle and upper classes have no inclination for the radio and fill their leisure time with watching television.

People who own a radio receiver set almost exclusively use it for utility purposes, particularly for their recreational pleasure. News, governmental speeches and advertisements are being listened to, but only because they are wedged between recreational programs. In sociological terms there is no prestige element in the ownership and use of a radio set. Its function is manifest only with very little or no latent functions attached. Even the Palapa has not been able to change or enhance this function.

The television for the urbanite in Indonesia has a far greater importance than the radio. It not only presents a combined listening and watching pleasure, it also has a status function to the owner.

Television in Indonesia was since its inauguration until the middle of the 1980's a strict government monopoly, financed and managed by the government for government speeches and other information as determined by the government. Commercials initially allowed and contributing a sizable portion of operational costs of the stations, was abruptly banned at the end of the 1970's. But a few years ago a private television station was allowed, the RCTI or Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia broadcasting primarily for recreation and commercials, but with the use of decoders limited to the area of Jakarta city only.

The televisioner ....

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The television as a social status symbol is manifested in a number of ways. First in its size, second in its connection with RCTI and third in the use of the conspicuously large parabolic antenna on the roof of the house. This antenna, priced several times the price of the largest colour television set, can receive broadcasts from neighbouring countries.

Television is for the man in the big city a device for recreation and it also functions as a window to the world. It widens the intellectual horizon of its watcher far beyond the borders of the country. It provides the public with knowledge about what is going on day by day in the world, sometimes even while it happens. Ardent television watchers tend to know more about the world outside their country than within.

This enhances the outward orientation of the leading personalities in the political, economic, military and other intellectual professions so much so that as one of the most well known economic experts of the country once remarks: "The middle class in Jakarta has adopted the high consumption life style of the elites in advanced countries".

#### EFFECTS OF MASS COMMUNICATION BROADCASTS ON THE RURAL POPULATION.

Telephones, and the facsimile that goes with it, belong to the privileges of urban communities. They are until today virtually non-existent in the rural areas except for the military and public offices. It is very rare that a farmer or any other private person in a village has a telephone at home. Consequently Palapa has through this line only some influence on the managing personnel of military and civil service offices in the rural areas but none on the population at large. This influence, fortunately, is positive in that telephone communication between head office in the city and branch offices in the rural areas proceed more quickly, clearly and conveniently. So far, however, the facsimile has not yet followed the telephone

to rural .....

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to rural communities. This also means that overseas calls and facsimile communications are still a rarity in Indonesia's rural areas.

With regard to radio and television broadcasts to rural areas one should make a distinction between villages with electricity and villages without electricity the latter called dark villages. The latter category of villages is of course handicapped since no television can be properly operated without cabled electric power.

People in dark villages have ventured to operate a television set with batteries, but in most cases, it is unsatisfactory. If the battery is weak the picture on the screen gets smaller and smaller until it disappears. Recharging the dead battery requires a trip to the nearby electrified town, which costs time, money, and energy. Proportionally only a small number of villages, perhaps less than 25% is power equipped and can operate a television.

Hundreds of village communities on the island of Java, and a smaller number on the outlying islands, have tried to introduce on their own electricity in their village. With gotong royong, communal effort, the people collect a fund to purchase a small generator from a nearby town. Electricity mechanics from the seller's store install the generator and connect the cables to the homes of the population. But since power has to be paid for regularly it is generally the locally well to do family in the village who can afford to use it. Once the generator-and-home connection is established a family can start to enjoy the use of power. In a survey on the effect of electricity on rural communities one of the questions asked was: "What do you use electricity for?" Ninety out of every one hundred respondents answered without hesitation: "First for lighting, and second for television."

But here again only the very well off village families can afford to buy and run a television set. An antenna on the roof signifies the high economic status of the owner. And often also his educational status.

Because . . . . .

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Because of the scarcity of television sets in villages and due to the family-spirit that makes the basis of the social system in the tradition oriented rural communities, a television set does not serve the members of the owner's single family only, but is open for watching to any member of the extended village family. The television has become a gathering place every night for all who care to come and watch.

It was perhaps unintendedly wise of the state owned television to have its broadcasts only after dark, until midnight. In that way television does not distract people from work at daytime. It also does not deprive people from sleep after midnight.

But today with Palapa in the sky and the huge parabole antenna television watchers can enjoy broadcasts from other countries, also at working time. It seems, however, that only children are attracted to television after school. School attendance may not be affected, but the children's homework often has come in disregard because of television. When children at home have no friends to play with and their parents are out to work, they very likely would resort to television for killing time. But with playmates to keep them active children at daytime tend to give a higher priority to active playing rather than to passive television watching. Healthy children with an abundance of energy and intellectual imagination obtain more satisfaction in games where they can take an active part rather than watch television that keeps them glued to their seats. Only after dark when they have limited opportunities to act out their stored energies children may be content with television watching.

For the people in villages in general television broadcasts have a variety of effects. Indonesian programs using the Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language) can be understood by an increasingly larger part of the watchers. Those who understand the Bahasa can understand the program and therefore need not force their imagination to grasp the meaning of what they are watching. But one should remember that to many ethnic groups the Bahasa Indonesia, adopted as the Indonesian national language only after the independence proclamation in 1945, is only their second language. Those who have no

enough ....

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enough opportunity to practise the Bahasa Indonesia may be able to understand it in part. When watching television they may hear the sound and voices which mysteriously come from the magic box, but they may not (fully) comprehend the meaning. Their imagination is pressed to fill the voids and the gaps in that understanding process.

But whatever the effects, television functions irresistably ✓ as an agent of distribution of the Bahasa Indonesia. In this regard it is matched by the radio. Without the two electronic media the Bahasa would not have spread so rapidly and so widely among the ethnic groups in the country. This function has been enhanced by Palapa which created a greater speed in spreading the national language over the population. In a politically laden congress of Indonesian youth organizations in October 1928, when the country was still under Dutch colonial rule, a pledge was dramatically adopted to create one country, one nation, and one bahasa. The first two elements, the country and the nation, were already established in 1945 and internationally recognized since 1950. But the third one, the Bahasa needed development and internalization in the basic personality of the people. The Palapa became usefully instrumental in this process of creating a lingua franca.

This social distribution of the Bahasa Indonesia has further effects. It strengthens the cultural and political unity of the nation. Before the introduction of the Bahasa Indonesia as the single national language people could hardly manage to carry an inter-ethnic communication because of the diversity of ethnic languages. But through the Bahasa Indonesia, which has always been consistently used by the government and in educational institutions, members of different ethnic groups could bridge their communication gap and converse with each other without difficulty.

In that way ethnic groups, which were seriously separated in the past by the strong ingroup feelings on each side, became more and more familiar with each other. This led to the weakening of ethnic in-group feelings to make way for national we-feelings.

To this ....

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To this effect a great deal has also been contributed by showing on the regional programs of television the cultural performances of each province. Television watchers in every place from Sabang in the North-West to Merauke in the South East of the country now know and appreciate dances, songs, traditional architectures, adat dress, and ceremonies in all its varieties of the archipelego.

The contribution of television in the process of nation building has been recognized since 1962 when it was introduced for the first time in Jakarta to cover the first Asian Games. From then on regional stations have been established in addition to the national station in the capital city of the nation. The system of having national and regional stations is in line with the principal nature of the state. Bhineka Tunggal Ika, which means Unity in Diversity. The unity of the state is realized in the Pancasila as the only basic philosophy of the state, the Constitution and all the state agencies on the national level. The national television station in Jakarta, owned and run by the state, operates on this level.

The regional stations serve the population in each province with broadcasts for local interests and local cultures. But all stations tune in each night on national broadcasts about international and national news. Important addresses from the President or a cabinet minister are also channeled nationwide through all stations.

With that system local populations do not lose their inherited ethnic identity, but at the same time they recognize themselves as part of the nation with each individual being aware of his status as a citizen.

The frequent appearances on television of President Soekarno (1945-1967) and President Suharto (1967 - ..... ) made their father figure widely popular among the population. In fact many people in the village feel quite honored and pleased by the "Presidential visits to their homes."

When the writer of this paper in a rural survey asked a man : "Do you know who is the President of our country ?" the man promptly

answered : .....

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answered: " Sure, I know him. I have met him many times ! "

" How ? "

" On television ! " was the answer.

To complement the picture it should be mentioned here that television has also brought about a rift between the young and old generation in villages. The young people, watching the almost unrestricted behaviours between the sexes in modern cities of the world, are inclined to imitate them, in their social system. The older generation, however, tend to condemn such behaviors as immoral and against the rules of adat and religion. The role played by Palapa in opening new areas for television has reinforced the change oriented inclinations of the young.

#### S U M M A R Y.

The Indonesia Palapa satellite has been most useful for the acceleration of Indonesia's national development, particularly in the field of instant and mass communication.

Instant communication between person and person was time and patience consuming before Palapa. But with Palapa telephone calls all over the country and in international relations can come through without delay and with a minimum of sound disturbances. This "instant" telephone communication, further enhanced by the telephone connected facsimile, has caused a great leap forward in the business world, including Indonesia. Fast and accurate information from person to person makes fast deals and rapid moves in business possible. Indonesia has, thanks among others to Palapa, now become an increasingly active member of the global economic community.

As a mass media facilitating instrument Palapa has through the radio, and the more so through television, opened the channels of communication to wide population areas of the country. The positive effects show in the spread of the Bahasa Indonesia as a lingua franca over and above local languages. It also has helped through television to make its watchers familiar with the cultures and art performances of other ethnics groups. It has also reinforced the people's sense of being a nation under the Republic of Indonesia from  
direct .....

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direct listening to important Governmental broadcasts and their personal familiarity with the father figure of the President of the Country from his frequent appearance on television. But on the negative side there seems to be a tendency of social conflict between modern behaviour patterns of the youth in imitation of television programmes from foreign countries and the disapproval of the conservative older generation who condemns such patterns as immoral and indecent,

Jakarta, 18 Juli 1990.-