

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION IN INDIA : PROSPECT AND TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

How did the discipline and practice of development communication begin? Who were the founders and how were the first experiments implemented? The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of development communication. To do so, the first section focuses on the theoretical perspective and evolution of development communication. This study then specifies the components of development communication and, having done so, proceeds to evaluate the various approaches to this conceptual formulation. Thus, it discusses the extension and community development approach, the ideological and mass mobilization method, the centralized mass media method, the localized mass media method, and the integrated approach. It concludes that since development communication is not simply concerned with the mere provision of information on development activities, it should not stop with conventional mass media. Rather, it must involve strong components of social organization and interpersonal and traditional modes and media if it is to succeed.

Keywords: Development communication, Community development, Mass media methods, Social organizations, Changing technologies etc.

Introduction

Development and communication are two terms heavily loaded with different conceptions and a richness of uses and functions shaped by their various theoretical underpinnings. Such richness often leads to ambiguities and a lack of clarity that affects the field of development communication. The wide range of interpretations of key terminology and the rapid evolution of some concepts have led to inconsistencies in the way basic terms are understood and used. What we have here, in fact, is more of an approach than a discipline. As far as its definitions are concerned, they usually consist of general statements. Thus, the communication media, in the context of development, are generally used to support development initiatives by the dissemination of messages that encourage the public to support development oriented projects. Although development strategies in developing countries diverge widely, the usual pattern for broadcasting and the press has been predominantly the same: informing the population about projects, illustrating the advantages of these projects, and recommending that they be supported. A typical example of such a strategy is situated in the area of family planning, where communication means such as posters, pamphlets, radio, and television attempt to persuade the public to accept birth control methods. Similar strategies are used in campaigns regarding health and nutrition, agricultural projects, education, and so on.

The concept of development communication arose within the framework of the contribution that communication and the media made to development in the countries of the Third World. Development communications are organized efforts to use communications processes and media to bring social and economic improvements, generally in developing countries. The field emerged in the late 1950's amid high hopes that radio and television could be put to use in the world's most disadvantaged countries to bring about dramatic progress. Early communications theorists like Wilbur Schramm and Daniel Lerner based their high expectations upon the apparent success of World War II propaganda, to which academia and Hollywood had contributed. Also with World War II came dozens of new, very poor, countries, left by their former colonial overseers with little infrastructure, education, or political stability. It was widely accepted that mass media could bring education, essential skills, social unity, and a desire to "modernize." Walt Rostow theorized that societies progress through specific stages of development on their way to modernity, what he termed "the age of high mass consumption." Lerner suggested that exposure to Western media would create "empathy" for modern culture, and a desire to move from traditional to modern ways. Early development communications, especially that sponsored by the U.S. government, was also seen as a means of "winning hearts and minds" over to a capitalist way of life.

Projects embodying these philosophies have enjoyed little success. In the 1970s and 1980s, a new paradigm of development communication emerged which better recognized the process of deliberate underdevelopment as a function of colonialism, the great diversity of the cultures involved, the differences between elite versus popular goals for social change, the considerable political and ideological constraints to change, and the endless varieties of ways different cultures communicate. But in some instances mass media technologies, including television, have been "magic multipliers" of development benefits. Educational television has been used effectively to supplement the work of teachers in classrooms in the teaching of literacy and other skills, but only in well designed programs which are integrated with other educational efforts. Consumer video equipment and VCRs have been used to supplement communications efforts in some small projects. Some developing countries have demonstrated success in using satellite television to provide useful information to portions of their populations out of reach of terrestrial broadcasting. In 1975 and 1976, an experimental satellite communications project called SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) was used to bring informational television programs to rural India. Some changes in beliefs and behaviors did occur, but there is little indication that satellite television was the best means to that end. The project did lead to Indian development of its own satellite network. China has also embarked on a ambitious program of satellite use for development, claiming substantial success in rural education. When television has succeeded as an educational tool in developing countries, it is only when very specific viewing conditions are met. For example, programs are best viewed in small groups with a teacher to introduce them and to lead a discussion afterwards.

In this new view of development, communication becomes an important catalyst for change, but not its cause. Local folk media, for example, is employed to reduces media's bias toward literacy and provide information in a traditional, familiar form. Development journalism provides people with information on change in their society, and works at the local level to advocate change. Where mass media is now employed in developing societies, community newspapers and radio prove far more accessible and useful than television. The rapid spread of entertainment television in the developing world is proving to be more a disruption to traditional social structures than an agent of progress. One emerging genre of television does show promise for contributing to development. The telenovela, pioneered in Brazil, has demonstrated some success in disseminating "prosocial" messages. Such programs are now

being evaluated in many countries for their effectiveness in contributing to population control, health education, and other development goals.

Development Communication in India Tracing its history we have to go back to communities who listened to rural radio broadcasts in the 1940s, the Indian school of development communication. One distinguishing element of those early programs was that they focused on the use of indigenous languages –Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada. India's earliest organized experiments in development communication were held in the 1960s, sponsored by India's universities and other educational institutions, and by the Bretton Woods school institutions. Educational institutions that played an important part in this effort include the University of Poona, the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi University, the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society and the University of Kerala. India is a developing country with lot of achievements in all the fields of modern day life including that of science & technology, agriculture and industry. Now development communication is such a tool of development that it is highly necessary for a developing nation like us. It has therefore been increasingly recognized that people's active participation is an essential component of sustainable development. Any intervention with the intent of achieving a real and sustainable improvement in the living conditions of people is doomed to failure unless the intended beneficiaries are actively involved in the process. Unless people participate in all phases of an intervention, from problem identification to research and implementation of solutions, the likelihood that sustainable change will occur is slim. Development communication is at the very heart of this challenge: it is the process by which people become leading actors in their own development. Communication enables people to go from being recipients of external development interventions to generators of their own development. The 20th century has witnessed the immense impact of communication technologies, from the spread of sound recording, motion pictures and radio as worldwide phenomena to the emergence of television as a dominant influence in nearly every institution, to the explosion of the Internet at the turn of the new century. The digital revolution is far from over, as new inventions repeatedly challenge assumptions that were themselves formed only yesterday. This is an exciting and critically important moment for communication scholars to contribute to understanding, and shaping the parameters of our changing technological and academic environment.

Relevance of Development Communication in India

Development communication is an essential feature for the Indian situation as we are still a developing nation with a large population next only to that of China. It is important to note that we do possess an enormously large amount of resources of all kinds including human and natural ones. But we are yet to achieve the kind of universal development of masses which should have been the optimum given the country's situation. Immediately after Independence in 1947, we faced the challenge of bringing about an equitable and regionally balanced distribution of wealth and development of the distant places of the country with limited resources. But, while the efforts of the government authorities are growing high, the population is also growing at an explosive rate over the years, thus causing a negative effect on all developmental initiatives.

It is important to note that India also possesses the largest pool of trained manpower in science and technology though our living standard still deserves a lot to be done. This is why development communication is still highly relevant for the Indian situation and its significance is growing every passing year due to the changing scenario. It is common knowledge that the more than two centuries of colonial rule of the country had left us with a very low level of progress along with an extremely higher rate of exploitation which is normal under such circumstances. This has left

the state machinery of the country after Independence with several major and vital challenges. These included – a very low level of literacy, lack of an adequate industrial base and infrastructure etc. among others. Our experience of the past fifty one years has demonstrated the crucial importance of communication in the field of development. Within this perspective of development communication, two trends developed successively: an approach that favored largescale actions and relied on the mass media, and an approach that promoted grassroots communication (also called community communication), promoting smallscale projects and relying especially on the light media (videos, posters, slide presentation, etc.). These trends, which still coexist today to various degrees within the field of development communication, are linked to the evolution of the development and communication models that have marked development efforts up to now.

The trend toward mass communication initially marked the first two decades during which the media were utilized in the field of development. It espoused the idea that it was enough to disseminate the knowledge and the technologies of the North to ensure that they were adopted. Once adopted, they would achieve the development of the South. This first vision of development is referred to as the paradigm of "modernization." These initial experiences, centered mainly around the mass media, relied both on a communication model based on persuasion and information transmission, and on a development model based on increasing economic activity and changes in values and attitudes.

Conceptual Evolution From the 1940's to the 60's, the age of the big media, the various communications approach to development included understanding in three areas (i) communication effects approach (ii) Diffusion of innovations approach and (iii) Mass Media and the modernization approach. In the communications effects approach, the earliest models of mass media effects conceptualized the impact of mass media as direct, powerful and uniform on individuals living in modern, industrial societies termed as mass societies. Also, the earlier models saw communication as a linear and one way process flowing from a powerful source to a passive receiver. After the II world war, there was a change of opinion in the sense that realization dawned that mass media rather than being sole agents of attitudinal and behavioral change were more agents of reinforcement. Thus, early formulations did exhibit conceptual shortcomings that stem from essentially the same idealist conception of history that informs the main sociological approach. They were simplistic and in sufficient accounts of social and political dynamics of change and lacked an adequate conception of the relationship between culture and social structure.

However, the shift in emphasis regarding role of mass media from one of dominant and powerful Influence to that of moderate or minimal effects did not make any significant difference of formulations advocating use of mass media for development in the III world countries. The view was that information and communication can be transferred to fields such as agricultural extension, health, education etc. Diffusions of innovations approach has important theoretical links with effects research, wherein the ability of media and opinion leaders to bring about knowledge and new ideas among a target audience which would in turn lead to its adoption. There are four critical variables summarized the development process: urbanization leading to increased literacy which in turn affects mass media exposure resulting in greater economic and political participation. A simple linear process but most important hypothesis has to do with the nature of the modern individual' who is characterized by an ability to accommodate to change plus a high degree of empathy. Generally people in traditional societies could expand their empathy by exposure to the mass media which in effect meant that mass media, in the third world, had the potential of bringing about modernization into isolated traditional communities and replacing the structure of life, values and behaviour which one sees in the western world. Thus, research in this tradition created high expectations for the media's role

towards development benefits in the third world. The whole approach up to the 60's was that the media would make indigenous audiences react favorably to opening up to the world and to the principles of market economy. The desired changes (developmental) were connected to a vertical, elitist, relationship in which the strong were helping and weak to be seduced by the blessings of science and technology, which were perceived as being exclusively western inventors.

Approaches and Perspectives to Development Communication The task of determining which communication approach and planning strategy to adopt in development communication projects is expected to be a deliberate and systematic endeavour. The execution of development communication programs and projects, therefore, takes as its starting point, both the "felt needs" at the social system level, and the "action needs as identified by development planners. Translating information and complex sociobehavioural messages into creative and effective approaches that trigger dialogue among participants is often one of the most challenging tasks within the design and delivery of a communication for development initiative. Technically sound and strategic communication initiatives run the risk of failure if they do not involve intended participants, consider local ethos and cultural modes of communication, or are perceived as boring, pedantic, insensitive, or disempowering by the participant groups. Development Communication takes as its starting point both the felt needs' at community or local level, and the 'action needs' as identified by planners. The operational strategy for meeting these two sets of needs follows four stages of activities. The first is identifying and analyzing the innovations sought by the community and those that development agents want to introduce to whom, when and with what material means. This is generally known as the diffusion stage in development communication. In the second stage, which is known as the social process stage, the thrust of activities is towards determining how existing social, cultural, psychological and indigenous communication factors, as well as government organizational factors, would help or hinder the adoption of new practices among the groups of people concerned. In the third stage, efforts are geared towards identifying existing media and how they relate to the people. Here, one looks at what combination of communication channels exist and how they can be used in the communities—traditional and interpersonal channels, as well as modern print and electronic media—for communication 'feed' both into and from the community or communities. Finally, after repeating these analyses for geographically or sectorally related projects, locally tailored communication programmes are drawn up and implemented in phases with the real action potential in the communities (taking into account available supplementary inputs from outside the community).

The Mass Media Approach the mass media have become instruments not only for information but also for education and development. Because of their unique characteristics of speedy delivery of messages and extensive reach (wide area coverage), they have been found to be particularly useful in the dissemination of development messages to large and dispersed populations, and, when properly used, in immediate follow-up with opportunities for exchange of ideas on the information/messages provided. The use of media in development can be treated at two levels: mass media, often using television, radio, and print media in campaigns aimed at inducing the adoption of innovations or other changes in behaviors; and community media, mainly using radio and other folk expressions such as theater, concerned with giving voice and representation to the various segments of local communities. Under this aspect, the program tries to promote use of various media (including interpersonal relations and traditional means of communication as much as the modern media) within systems of interactive or two-way communication that can be appropriated by groups or communities, and that are based not on the transmission of information or hortatory messages, but on facilitating the exchange of ideas. In any given context, the use of these systems must be linked to a

process of community communication that will define the parameters under which they are designed or introduced, the conditions for setting them up, and the ways in which they can be evaluated.

Conclusion

Development communication is not merely concerned with providing information on development activities. Besides creating opportunity for the people to know about the technical nature of new ideas and on how they work and with what effect, development communication plays the more important role of creating an atmosphere for understanding how these new ideas fit into the real social situation in which the people operate. Its ultimate goal is to catalyze local development activities, local development planning and implementation, and local communication to smoothen the path to development. Communication here should not stop with conventional mass media. If development communication must succeed, then it must include strong components of social organization and interpersonal as well as traditional modes and media. In addition, those in charge of planning development communication must be those who understand the social structure and how change can take place in it, not merely how development messages can be disseminated.

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