

RESEARCH ARTICLE

PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

In the last decade, participatory communication approaches have been increasingly popular, but little research has looked at the theoretical underpinnings of this approach to development. The role of participatory communication in development projects/programs and how it might promote social change in society are discussed in this article. The goal of this article is to emphasize the importance of the development and communication models, as well as participation in the past and present. This research examines historical and present methods for development communication using a descriptive style of a literature evaluation. This study proposes that structuration theory can help people understand how to negotiate social change within the existing institutional system in which they function, which is useful for participatory communication for development. The steps of the participatory communication cycle were described in parallel with the project cycle for development activities through an exhaustive literature review. However, to sharpen participatory communication for its efficacy and efficiency in development activity, the operational gap between progressive thinking on horizontal, democratic participatory processes and modern development project practice must be bridged.

KEYWORDS

Democratic, project, progressive, social change, structuration

1. INTRODUCTION

The development model and the communication approach i.e., the structure of the information usually reflect the social structure and existing power relationship in the society.

During 1960/and the 70s the development activity was perceived as growth-oriented i.e., economic growth. The development activities carried out in this period hadn't gained efficiency and effectiveness as expected by the scholar. Instead of fulfilling the need and the problems of the majority of the people, it only increased the public debt, inequalities, and frustration among people. Similarly, the communication approach used during those times only purpose for the minority of the people (i.e., developed countries) rather than for the development of the majority of the people who require the service most.

Participatory communication emerged during the 1980/and the 90s served as the fulfillment of these challenges faced by the government in 1960/and 70s. Participatory communication is about involving all the stakeholders in the development activity with an aim of social change and empowerment in them. However, this approach is dominant in the recent decade but very few studies have explored the theoretical foundations of the approach to development (Jacobson et al., 1999).

This paper, in particular, draws on participation communication approaches, to explain how institutional forces can act as both facilitators and constraints to the process of change. Furthermore, this paper explains how the development paradigm views participatory communication for development. The current paper would add to the literature on how participatory communication plays its role in the development project/program and how it can promote social change in society.

- ❖ Historical overview of the development debate in general, and

development communication in particular;

- ❖ Distinctions between a diffusionist or top-down communication model and a participative or bottom-up communication model;
- ❖ Participatory communication in development projects and social change
- ❖ The implication of participatory communication in the existing social structure of a society

2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive method of literature review in which the participatory communication role for the development project/program and how it can promote a social change in the society has been carried out. For this, information from different secondary sources like journals, books, review articles, and online repositories has been collected. By the summation of various findings and perspectives from different empirical evidence, the study reveals a clear picture regarding the participatory communication paradigm and its role in the development and social change in society.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 From Modernization to Multiplicity

As industrialization began the meaning of development changed over time. The concept of the development of communication is especially given focus by the different scholars in 1950/and the 60s (Schramm, 2008). During that time, they believed that introduction of the media and the information (political, economic, educational, etc.) into the social system

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could transform them into industrial societies (Morris, 2001a). As the USA and the Soviet Union tried to expand their influence in the developing countries and define the development in their own political and economic ideologies to transform the societies. At the same time, some Atlantic nation views development as tools to achieve welfare through the adoption of new technologies and a centralized model of development. This gives rise to more economic views of the development giving rise to the modernization and growth theory (Servaes et al., 2005).

The concept of modernization assumes that when the idea and message are transferred from the rich to the poor or third-world countries, wealth and development occur. It specifically refers to "catching up" to the quality of life of Western nations and understanding it in terms of the quantitative difference between the rich and poor (Black, 1991). It follows the top-down, one-way, and diffusion communication practices, whereby the rich (first world countries) seems to generate the information or the ideas (as a source), and the developing countries were seen as a receiver of the intended information that is needed to be uplifted. During this course of the time, different communication models were adopted to transfer the information i.e., the Laswell model, Shanon-weaver model, Schram's model of mass communication, etc. (Fedaghi, 2012; Sapienza et al., 2015). All these models especially focus on the source (produced message), message (enough to persuade others), and the channel (noise-free) to reach the targeted audience (Servaes et al., 2005).

During the 1970s, the intellectual revolution challenges the modernization perspective on development and communication. These challenges give rise to the dependency theory the development and development communication. This view assumes that, like the concept of modernization, development will occur as ideas are propagated in underdeveloped societies from developed societies. This also advocated the diffusion model of the communication development with an ultimate goal of the behavior changes with a motive to persuade people to change their behavior by providing them with information i.e., change in knowledge, attitude and practice as that of above. Apart from the modernization theory, is believed that there is a dependency between the receiver and the sender i.e., the source. It addresses that the source should know the targeted audience and receiver's social-economic condition for the stimulus to be effective. It is believed that the development and the socio-economic context are related to each other's (Ball-Rokeach et al., 1976; Servaes et al., 2005).

Both of the paradigms can't achieve success as scholars and development agencies thought. Both of the paradigms can't transmit the message to the targeted audience effectively. Different scholars realized that the blanket multinational strategy for the underdeveloped won't work. Similarly, the dependency paradigm tries to address the receiver's knowledge and their socioeconomic condition while formulating the message, it also ignores critical stakeholders, especially the target audience in the media development process. Similarly, the success of the socialist and the popular movement in Cuba, China, Chile, and the other countries share the idea of independence from the super-power i.e., First world countries. These all contexts and the phenomenon demanded a new paradigm shift in the development and the communication practices (Servaes et al., 2005).

As the concept of human development rises as one of the integral structures of the development as advocated by the USAID in the 1990s it explores participation as one of the important dimensions of human development. This gave rise to the concept of participatory development in the 1990s (Empowerment). As the scholar consistently advocated a change in the communication strategy along with the development paradigm as countries and the nation faces multiple crises apart from the economic and financial crisis, the interdependency between the countries becomes more important. This leads to the scholars and the policymakers feeling the relevance and the importance of participatory communication for the development. The scholar () then focuses on the development of the community by addressing the local culture, social values, and the structure i.e., seen as a set of views of the activities which reflect a solution to the specific activity. This gives rise to the multiplicity paradigm and participatory model as a reaction to the assumption of the diffusion model and previous paradigm (Servaes et al., 1996).

This paradigm considers the concept of development as the result of the cooperation and participation of all the actors and considers communication as an important and indispensable tool for participation. Context felt the need of the receiver and getting them into the communication process to proffer the solution is an important aspect of this paradigm. It utilizes the horizontal, two-way, and participatory communication strategy i.e., the idea spread from the inside out/ bottom-up process during the diagnosis, Planning, Intervention, and Assessment

process. The theme of this paradigm is that change must be structural and happen at multiple levels to achieve these goals (Ebigbagha, 2016; Servaes et al., 2005)

3.2 Overview of development communication model

Development communication is defined as the use of the communication strategy in the development activity to promote social development. However, in today's world multiplicity communication perspectives were applied, yet two schools of communication thought were broadly described and used in the development activities i.e., the Diffusion model and the Participatory model (Servaes et al., 2005; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

As a result of the modernization and dependency paradigm of development, the diffusion communication model was developed and widely practiced. This model adopts a wide range of communication strategies to solve the problem due to the lack of knowledge and information. It involves a hierarchical (top-down) model of the information transfer from the source to the receiver. The external agent drives the process of communication with or without the participation of the stakeholder in this model. Mass communication and the national media communication strategy were adopted to persuade people to adopt the development activity (Chitnis, 2005; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

Different scholars like Everett Roger(1983) address the more planned and systematic way of diffusion process along with the conclusion mass communication is less likely to have a direct impact on social behavior than personal influence (interpersonal communication). The majority of the research in the 1980s conclude that more learned from interpersonal contact and the lowest level of grassroots media than only through mass communication. Similarly, shifting the development paradigm from dependency to multiplicity also asks for a new perspective on communication strategy than the traditional one. This overall factor led to the development of the participatory communication model in the development (Morris, 2001b).

The participatory model is based upon the multiplicity framework of the development. This approach urges the involvement of all stakeholders from the planning to the monitoring and evaluation phase. This school emphasizes the cultural identity of local communities and the importance of democratization and participation at all levels (international, national, local, and individual). It helps to determine strategic communication objectives among the stakeholder and the action plan to achieve them. It is not only to convey correct or relevant information to specific audiences but to clarify the collective actions and reflection processes of relevant actors, to empower citizens through their active participation i.e., horizontal or two-way communication (Morris, 2001b; Servaes et al., 2005).

Table 1: Different Approach to Communication

Development communication	Diffusion model	Participatory Model
Goal	To provide knowledge or information	To involve all relevant stakeholders in the participation process.
Catalyst	External agent	Both external and internal. External only as a mediator.
Notion of education	Banking pedagogy	Banking pedagogy
Participation	Passive participation	Active participation
Desired change	Change in Knowledge, attitude and behavior numerically	Individual and social change, social norms, and power relationships exist in society.

Source: (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009)

There are two distinct approaches to participatory communication i.e., the Dialogical pedagogy of Paulo and the UNESCO idea of access, participation, and self-management. Paulo's dialogical pedagogy especially addressed dual theoretical strategy i.e., dialogical communication, and insisted that in any political process, the marginally poor peoples must be considered fully human subjects. This approach is slightly based upon Marxism and the Sartre externalism. However, this approach isn't quite as popular as the UNESCO approaches. UNESCO's approach to participatory communication especially focuses on access, participation, and self-

management as an idea of gradual progression. This approach focuses on the institution rather than the oppressed people as in the Paulo approach (Servaes et al., 2005).

4. PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Participatory and communication are two different terms with multifaceted connotations. However, in this article Participatory communication is defined as a method based on dialogue that allows information, perceptions, and opinions to be shared between different actors, thus promoting empowerment among community members. Participatory communication isn't just about sharing the information, it further helps us to explore the new knowledge and application of this new and past knowledge to address the problem they face (Porio, 1990; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

Many works of literature describe the participatory communication in the development activity or the program/project cycle by embracing the participation. As the development activity wasn't gain success (to fulfill their objective) in the 1970/the 80s, the concept of participatory arose as discussed above (Huesca, 2003). Different scholars believed that proper application of the communication tools and techniques along with the contextual environment, and engagement of all the stakeholders should be considered while planning or developing the activity. Engagement of all stakeholders from the beginning to the end of the project not only helps to achieve a better result but also helps to empower them by fulfilling the social function and by giving a voice to the poor. This approach helps the project or the program to go beyond its achievable goal and objectives to eradicate poverty alleviation, hunger, malnutrition, and so on. Overall, this approach helps many developments or program to become relevant in the long term and to achieve sustainability (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

When any of the programs or the activities were developed, to adapt the participatory communication approaches in it, one should have run the communication program cycle parallel to the project cycle at the same time. Some of the basic steps of the participatory communication cycle were:

1. Participatory communication assessment
2. Participatory communication strategy design
3. Implementation of communication objectives
4. Monitoring and Evaluation

4.1 Participatory communication assessment

In this approach, the relevancy of the project or the program is determined along with the needed changes (in behavior) through the two-way communication tools and techniques. In this process, all the relevant stakeholders were involved in the open dialogue and the space. At first, the dialogue between the stakeholder will be facilitated to assess the need, problems, need priorities, opportunities, and the solution. Along with that, the socio-cultural context of the stakeholder will be explored and finally through the common understanding and the trust needed change was defined. In this step, the popular funnel approach will help us to zoom in to the key issue through the participatory communication process.

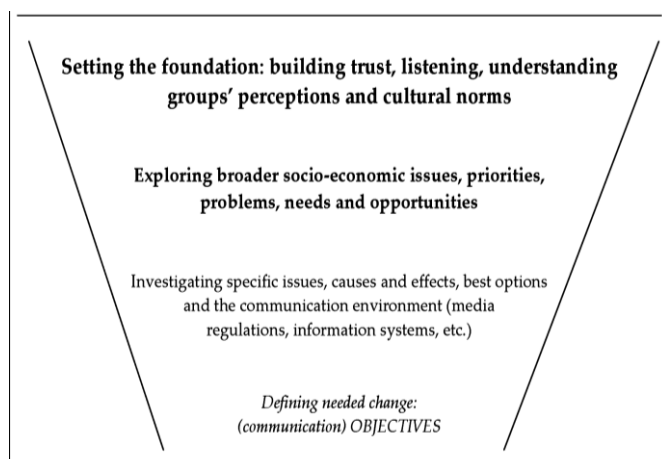


Figure 1: The Funnel Approach: Zooming in on Key Issues

Source: (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009)

4.2 Participatory communication study design

Participatory communication objectives started with the identification of the objectives. Active participation of the key stakeholder is required in this stage. For a proper study design, the context culture, perception and the priorities of the audience or the target group should be considered. In the participatory communication process mainly, dialogical modality is followed. The basic steps followed in the participatory communication study design are:

- a. SMART objectives
- b. Involvement of stakeholder
- c. Level and type of change
- d. Communication approaches and change
- e. Communication channel and partners
- f. Target issue
- g. Expected output or outcome

4.3 Implementation of communication objectives

After a communication strategy has been developed, it is time to put this planned strategy into action. The prepared plan was implemented in this phase with the ongoing monitoring of the activities. If the strategy was made properly the activities were more straightforward, certain slight modifications may have to be made to adapt to the changing and unanticipated conditions raised during the implementation phase.

4.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and the evaluation of the program were conducted during the implementation and the end of the project. It will help us to understand whether the activities go according to the plan or not whereas evaluation helps us to understand the real impact of the project.

In the participatory communication process, the monitoring and evaluation indicators were defined during the program planning phase. The indicator may be a quantitative or qualitative phase. Apart from the top-down model, these approaches involve all the stakeholders in the evaluation phase (not outside experts). All the indicators were determined jointly by all stakeholders to measure the change in the program/project (Porio, 1990; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

5. PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The participatory model involves all stakeholders in the development activities from the beginning to the end. The major goal of the participatory communication model is to promote social change. As all the stakeholders are involved in a program or the activities through the open dialogue, and communication media for the planning of the evaluation activities, it provides the information or knowledge to the stakeholder and facilitates to go beyond this. Participatory communication approaches help people to identify their problems by analyzing the socio-economic condition of the society and to solve the problem on their own. It helps stakeholders to feel the ownership in the program they were engaged in and facilitate the decision-making process (Servaes et al., 1996). This in turn helps themselves for structural changes in the society to alter the existing power relations in the society. These approaches help the people to widen their access to the capital, their capability (transform them into the desired form), and the livelihood option. Overall, this helps people to upgrade their living standards and quality of life in the long term (Servaes, 2007; Servaes et al., 2005).

6. IMPLICATION

Participatory communication is seen as promoting a horizontal system with a more democratic means of the decision-making approach. It is quite endorsed by the different scholars and promotes to be adopted in the development strategy for the social change i.e., to promote participation from the below and sharing the relevant information to all the stakeholders. However, there is an operational gap between progressive thinking on horizontal, democratic participatory processes and contemporary development project practice (Riano, 1990; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

In the majority of the countries of the world, the mostly top-down (one-

way) bureaucratic system is followed. Participatory communication asks for the bottom-up approach of communication in development. It promotes to goes with them and learning with them to the local people to plan, execute and evaluate them. The only responsibility of the expert is to act as a mediator in a group. While following the principle of communication development, several questions may be arising in the implementation phase: "How does the facilitator face the paradox of assuming the leadership when participation is low? Should the facilitator be an active participant without attempting to influence or intervene?". So, these may create confusion while implementing participatory communication in development (Riano, 1990; Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

Similarly, funding was the major problem for the development activities whether it is participatory or not. Most participatory communication has promoted the involvement of the grassroots organization in all steps of the communication methods. Due to a lack of resources, skill, personnel, organizational issues, and a lack of consensus on what are the major priorities and how to engage in the new activity, these grass-root organizations do not plan or strategize on the project (Waisbord, 2008). The majority of the population thinks it is a burden for participation because they have neither time nor necessary resources. Similarly, the majority of the program was funded by the large organizations (NGOs/INGOs) according to their objectives and goal, in this condition, the program with the participation communication can't adapt its philosophy as it is an inside-out process (Riano, 1990). Whereas, government, development communicators, planners, and policymakers fear the small impact of the participatory experience, difficulty in replication, long duration of intervention, and absence of adequate evaluation criteria (Ali and Sonderling, 2017). Some scholars believed that it is too slow to apply widely. So, although it may have a great aspect in terms of development and long term, this criticism poses great challenges in the adoption and implementation of participatory communication.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper addresses the participatory communication role of the development project/program and how it can promote social change in society. The purpose of this article is to highlight the relevancy of the development model and communication model along with the participation in the past and the present. Different communication approaches adopted during the development program were discussed from conceptualizing the impetus factor for the modernization and dependency paradigm. The era of modernization and dependency advocated the diffusion model of communication development with an ultimate goal of behavior changes with a motive to persuade people to change their behavior by providing them with information i.e., change in knowledge, attitude and practice.

Participatory communication has gained momentum from the 1990s after the paradigm shift of the development model from dependency to multiplicity, which questions the importance and relevancy of the unidirectional communication model in development activities. This approach emphasizes the cultural identity of local communities and the importance of democratization and participation at all levels. Through the extensive literature review, the steps of the participatory communication cycle were described in parallel to the project cycle for the development activities.

Although there is a lot of optimism about participatory communication in the development initiatives and the social change, it is not able to flourish as expected. There is also a growing belief that existing bureaucratic and institutional entities may be incapable of playing the "catalyst" role. However, there is an operational gap between progressive thinking on horizontal, democratic participatory processes and contemporary development project practice. So, to succeed, participatory approaches must sharpen their strategies to erode the existing social structure and influence these power structures of the society.

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