Chapter 12
Study on Learning of Communication Channels at the Grassroots Level With Reference to Social Issues

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ABSTRACT

Communication helps an individual to survive, grow, progress, and develop within a structure. Communication also creates a common pool of ideas and beliefs through a systematic process. When it comes to rural areas, the role of communication and communicators becomes more important because of the educational background of people. The Indian rural population faces a lot of social issues like girl's education, dowery, domestic violence, etc. The government always initiates number of programs in rural areas to make people aware regarding the social issues. Also, the change agents like educators and NGO workers work along with the government agencies, but most of the time, the campaign fails to impress the people at grassroot level. The communication at grass root level allows rural people to be at the centre of any initiatives. There are so many formal channels of communication in rural areas and there are some informal channels of communication at grass root level which helps people to understand information as they are.

INTRODUCTION

Effective communication is one of the most important factors in Rural Development. The communication channels developed amongst government agencies, rural institutions, and individuals create the chances to make a certain segment of information and experience desirable for rural development (Fowsar et al., 2020). Government agencies have been initiating and running various social issues campaigns in rural areas, which stretches in all directions. There are so many successful campaigns that make people aware of various social issues. Rural audiences must be involved in all grassroots communications because they

are central to any development initiative (Fowsar, 2020). The responsibility of mass media in progress can be split into three parts, i.e., information, instruction, and participation (Rameez et al., 2020). To initiate information, it is very important to keep all concerned in the loop so it can lead to instructions and then the participation of the larger group. When it comes to rural areas, the communication channel is not in the hand of one authority, but there are so many officials involved (Rameez, 2019). Whether it is a government-appointed person, a local teacher with no official designation, or any other powerful 'opinion leader' of the village. Rural areas, specifically areas far from any city or major spot and with no concrete communication infrastructure, always face a problem of getting authentic information. In such cases, the informal source of communication helps government agencies a lot (Rameez, 2018). It has been observed that the people in rural areas listen to their local influencers and try to get wisdom and knowledge about the various awareness programs from them. It is also reflected in the cinemas where the person who is literate and considered to be knowledgeable, people always take his/her advice. Communication in primitive social structures not only satisfies people's needs but also achieves society's functional and persistent needs. In any rural social structure, informal communication sources help maintain traditional knowledge. Indeed, the rural areas in India are now equipped with television networks, mobile phones, the internet, various public service advertising, etc. Still, on the other hand, it is also true that illiterate audiences are very easy to be manipulated, and they don't easily decode the core of the communication. Most of the time, the rural audiences act like laggards, i.e., the last ones to adopt effective communication about social issues. Such an audience waits for others (Early Adopters) to follow or adopt any new communication, and they see their reaction. If the communication is helping the early adopters, then the laggards follow the same (Fowsar et al., 2022).

The change agencies are running many campaigns to make people aware, and in rural areas, the role of opinion leaders is very important in spreading such information. The opinion leader is an entity that can change the attitude and beliefs of another individual (Rogers, 1962). Opinion leaders are kind of unannounced leaders whom people trust and listen to his/her wise words. Change agents within a certain social structure use the opinions of such leaders as lieutenants in awareness campaigns. The same experience can also be seen in the first chapter of The Passing of Traditional Society, The Grocer, and The Chief (Lerner, 1958). The reason for ineffective communication can be so many. It can be the background of the receiver, the attitude of the social structure, or the inability of the Communicator. In many things, communication is also considered to be ineffective when people do not want to be changed or the opinion leader is very traditional. One of the recent examples of such a situation can be seen in the web series Panchayat (Rameez and Fowsar, 2018). The change agent is trying to spread awareness about birth control through wall paintings, and one of the citizens cannot decode the message. This is truly an example of day-to-day life in rural India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various researchers, authors, thinkers, and change agencies have tried to explore communication in rural development. Wilbur Schramm (1977), in his book Mass Media, and National Development, talks about the involvement of media channels with various interpersonal channels at the local level. Development in underdeveloped and developing countries can take place quickly when big change agencies shake hands with local-level change agents who always have a grip on their people. On the other hand, Katz (1961) says:

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