

MAJOR PARADIGMS OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION

(Unit 2)

There are three major paradigms of development identified ideologically and historically (Rogers, 2008) are as following:

I) The Dominant Paradigm (modernisation)

I) The Opposing Paradigm (dependency)

III) The Emerging Paradigm (participation)

I) DOMINANT PARADIGM:

This perspective emerged from the concept of development to be “modernisation.” Evolved after the World War II, the central idea of this paradigm was to solve development problems by "modernising" underdeveloped countries. This thought was part of the dominant culture or we can say the majority atleast believed this (capitalism and embracing modernity) to be answer to development issues. This approach advised the society, how to be effective in following the behaviour of the rich and influential or we can say pattern of the capitalist driven western economies. Development was equated with economic growth. The modernisation approach is to promote and support capitalist economic development. In an extent the followers of this paradigm believe that the Western model of economic growth is universally applicable and persuaded people to adopt the modern technology (Melkote & Leslie, 2015). Paulo Freire (2008) defined four major levels of dominant paradigm:

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- ◆ Cultural level,
- ◆ Technocratic level,
- ◆ Political level,
- ◆ Economic level.

Modernisation promoted to change the mindset of individuals under developed countries and advised to abandon traditional beliefs to embrace innovation and modernity at the cultural level. (Lerner 1958). At the technocratic level, modernisation proposed to rely on scientific method, whereas political freedom and the adoption of democratic systems need to be followed at the political level. And at the economic level, virtues and power of the free market is blindly followed, with no or minimal government intervention (Freire, 2008). In 1950s and 1960s, the main aim of modernisation was to measure economic growth as development.

Here the conception of development is a linear one based on trust in science, reason, technology, and the free market (Freire, 2008). This perspective is criticised for overtly focusing on the economic aspect and ignoring the broader aspect of socio-cultural impact. Further, this paradigm is believed to be culturally insensitive, theoretically flawed, and methodologically inadequate (Servaes, 1991). Communication was associated with the dissemination of information and messages aimed at modernising the “backward or under – developed or developing” countries and their people.

Media seemed to be the loadstar as it provided with communication initiatives that is largely dependent on the traditional vertical or one-way model: SenderMessage-Channel-Receiver (SMCR). “Communication was expected to help modernise people’s attitudes and ways of thinking, which would be conducive to support of the economic model” (Melkote and Stevens 2001). Communication in the dominant paradigm is linked with the linear mass media model aimed at transmitting information and messages in a vertical or top-down fashion, believed in the persuasive power of media, till 1970s (Freire,2008).

Lasswell’s (1948) linear communication model reflected the use of communication to persuade audiences to change behaviours.

The failure of modernisation caused the re-analysis of the theoretical models of communication, such as “the hypodermic needle theory” or “the bullet theory,” which overemphasised the power of media over people. It is evident that media alone cannot change people’s mind-set and behaviour and moreover audiences are not as passive either (Freire, 2008). The new perspectives in development communication began between 1970 and 1980 subsequently, an alternate way of thinking about development emerged.

II) THE OPPOSING PARADIGM (DEPENDENCY):

In the 1970s political-economic aspect of development was considered a better alternative for “modernisation” and after strong opposition against the modernisation paradigm, emergence of an alternative theoretical model set afloat, based on the dependency theory.

This school of thought criticises some of the core assumptions of the modernisation paradigm, such as neglecting social, historical, and economic factors. It accuses the dominant paradigm of being very Western-centric, overlooking any alternative route to development.

The dependency theorists emphasised the importance of the link between communication and culture. According to A.G. Frank (1969), development and underdevelopment are the two faces of the same coin, shaped by specific historical, economic, and political factors. He developed this view based on a structural analysis of the international capitalist system (Freire, 2008).

This alternate thinking of development challenged the dominate pattern of modernisation and argued for political and economic restructuring for an equal distribution in society (Freire, 2008; Melkote & Leslie, 2015).

To address the imbalances in the world’s state of affairs, dependency theory proposed developing countries to work on two levels. National level they need to be economically self-reliant and less dependent on foreign imports. Internationally, they should form alliances among themselves to create a stronger political presence (Freire, 2008).

It demanded a more balanced and equitable exchange of communication, information, and cultural programs, among rich and poor countries. The main idea was to stimulate growth of domestic industrialisation (McMichael 1996). But it was unable to deliver an appropriate method/s to address development challenges.

Critics accused this model of becoming too economically focused and not considering social and cultural factors, like dominance theory. And the focus of communication is not prominent in this paradigm.

Media and flow of information played a minor role internationally. With all differences between modernisation and dependency theories, their communication model was same: a one-way communication flow, with the main difference between the two theories being who was controlling and sending the message and for what purpose.

The supporters of this theory debated for re-analysing the communication agenda in lines of a balanced communication flow internationally. They suggested to ponder the various component of communication within countries and to entrust on the private media and community media (Freire, 2008). Although the dependency theory had gained a significant impact during the 1970s, yet it started to lose relevance around 1980s.

III) THE EMERGING PARADIGM (PARTICIPATION):

This participatory model is less oriented towards political-economic dimension and more rooted in cultural realities of development focusing on peoples' participation. Slowly there was a shift from economic aspect towards social aspects. This development was considered positive for the long run.

“Participation” is recognised as an important part of sustainable development strategies. The refusal of the above two paradigms, only put forth this new emerging paradigm, advocating for not just people's participation but also for empowerment.

According to Melkote (2015), the emerging perspective is referred as liberation or monastic, a third area of thinking which practices development and social change. Paulo Freire (1973) is the most distinguished scholar advocated development as liberation, derived from liberation theology (Melkote, 2015). A few more theories surfaced in the lines of participatory and people-based development like, multiplicity paradigm (Servaes 1991), the empowerment approach (Friedmann 1992).

Common features of this perspective are the emphasis on people, the endogenous vision of development, and the attention to power and rights issues at grass root level (Freire, 2008). “Participatory” paradigm emphasised upon two-way communication principles and practices.

Development communication has increasingly moved toward a horizontal, “two-way” model, which favours peoples' active and direct interaction through consultation and dialogue with the help of traditional form (one-way information dissemination) of mass media. It also assesses risks, identifies solutions, and seeks consensus for action. These qualities are seen as a key to the success and sustainable development efforts.

This paradigm is changing the way communication is conceived and applied. It shifts the emphasis from information dissemination to situation analysis, from persuasion to participation.

Though media is no longer the central element, just a means of communication yet this paradigm is broadening its scope, maintaining the key functions of informing people and promoting change, still maintaining the importance of using communication to involve stakeholders in the process of development.

Paper: Development Communication

Course: BJMC, Semester: II, Institution: DSPMU, Ranchi

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