

ROLE OF MEDIA IN REDUCING RURAL POVERTY; A STUDY ON ROLE OF TELEVISION IN REDUCING RURAL POVERTY IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract:“Mass Media with its sixty plus years history and its perceived capability to directly affect large audience has enormous capacity to communicate for and about development. Especially, Television has been continuously evolving as the most ‘massive’ of the media in terms of reach, time spent and popularity, has barely changed over thirty years and it add all the time to its global audience” (Mc Quail, 2010: 35) Wilkins (2008) opines that participation ,of the stakeholders, particularly the marginalized communities , in the developmental process is mandatory in a democratic system. Conceptualizations and justifications for participatory development come under a comprehensive spectrum spanning from recognition of the process to the consequences resulted upon the society. Development practitioners, professionals and governments all over the world have been exploring ways to maximize participation of beneficiary communities in the process as one of the key factors contributing to success. Participation is a tool that helps development planners to utilize indigenous skills of the communities in the process and integrate new knowledge into the communities as well. Some development institutions consider participation is a one-off thing that occurs in the mid of the total process. participation and mobilization can be promoted as a part of media coverage. Wilkins (2008) discusses about the way media communicates on development, questioning the way that social change projects articulate assumptions about problems, solutions, and communities while emphasizing that the ongoing discussion on communicating about development contribute towards improving strategies for communication for development. Hence this research study will examine how the documentary genre in television media frame issues pertaining to poverty and how producers in Sri Lankan television industry identify their role within the context of poverty; what factors influence the television to discuss poverty among rural poor. The findings may conclude whether television has been utilized fully for the benefit of rural community and to what extent the rural poverty is discussed in that media, with suggestions to improve the television output to reduce the knowledge gaps among rural poor, improve participation and reduce rural poverty.

Keywords: Poverty, Rural, Television, Media

Introduction

Normative media theories have emerged from the economic, cultural and social needs of the masses such as journalism professions, citizens, the state and the interested groups in societies providing provisions for serving the public interests. McQuails (2010) elaborating on the normative mass media theories affirm that mass media is presumed to have effects on the society and expected to have an important social purpose behind its function. As a result some of the media effects such as dissemination of information, expressing different views and voices, entertainment and cultural activities and helping public to form opinions on issues and facilitating debates have been positively valued by the society. Development Goals (MDG) Country Report (2008/2009) pronounced Sri Lanka as a unique country in its approach to human development, especially its continued progress in MDGs in health and education while reiterating on the disparity in Sri Lanka’s economic growth. The

report emphasized that while the economic growth achieved at national scale has been admirable, progress in some parts of the central and southern provinces is severely lacking. Due to slow economic performances in such backward districts poverty is continuously persistent at national level indicators. Further, according to this report the GDP contribution in sector wise shows that the Agriculture sector contributes to the total GDP by 11.7%. This is the lowest of all sectors, while the industry and services sectors reported 29.1% and 59.2% respectively. This implies that 80% of the rural population, whose main economic activity is agriculture, contributes merely a small percentage to the total GDP in Sri Lanka. Therefore rural development holds a key importance in the national development planning. Rural development as (Edeani, 1993) noted, holds the key to national development for three reasons: firstly, because of the enormous size of the rural population, secondly as a large share of the country's natural resources are located in rural areas, and finally, because of the disproportionate role the rural community plays in economic, social and political life of the nation. The communication specialists such as (Dhawan, 1972) states that the television is working opposite to the ideals for community empowerment. Rather the television media engrosses consumerism and escapism that lead to commodification of everything and increase poverty among rural poor in many aspects. Therefore media organizational perception on development, poverty and rural community, education and knowledge of the producer on such issues and the opinions and behaviors of the viewership and so on are some determinant that impacts the communication for and about development.

Objective of Study

This study will examine how the television documentary genre frame issues pertaining to poverty and how producers in Sri Lankan television perceive their role within the context of poverty; what factors influence the television to discuss poverty among rural poor.

Questions Statement

Specific research questions expected to be answered with regard to the television, development and the reduction of rural poverty in Sri Lanka are given as follows; whether poverty among rural communities has been address in a substantial manner and consistent with the development requirements of the communities? How the television documentaries in Sri Lanka frame rural poverty? How television journalistic culture in Sri Lanka influences development? Has television helped to reduce the knowledge gap among rural communities and enable them to participate in decision making in the development process.

Hypothesis

Television documentary culture in Sri Lanka is not contributing to minimize the knowledge gaps among rural poor.

Methodology

Ethnographic action research approach was used for the study. It is not one specific method but specially followed five steps as the research methodology. Those five steps were reviewing literature, documentaries observation with questionnaire, audience research, focus group discussion and in depth interview. Audience research and questionnaire helped to do a quantitative analysis of data. Several methods were used to research the audience. That was observation, informal discussions and questionnaire. In depth interviews with documentary producers, intellectuals and media experts about the rural poverty aspects of Sri Lankan documentary production culture in their point of view. Primary data and statistics of the other researchers used to understand poverty in the rural regions of the Sri Lanka. But it will not satisfy itself only with the quantitative data. Instead it will seek to make use of the qualitative information. Thus this study will make extensive use of qualitative data and information in seeking to make the case of rural poverty. Main focus was given to understand documentary in relation to development and rural poverty and how the documentary genre

thematically organized the story to cover poverty among rural communities. Keeping in line with the development communication concepts whether visually appropriate and powerful representations were made about rural communities was also considered. Therefore, such qualitative information of the main documentaries? of the two channels for six month were taken into account and converted to quantitative data.

Sample Population

Two local television stations were selected as the study population. The criteria for selection were based on, development program , viewership, coverage and accessibility. Sri Lanka Rupavahini is state owned channels with the highest coverage and viewership. Between ITN and Rupavahini, ITN enjoys the best coverage and viewership (LMRB, first quarter, 2012). However, accessibility to information was provided in Rupavahini and therefore it was decided to take Rupavahini as the state sector sample unit. Sirasa TV was selected as it enjoys the highest viewership and coverage among the commercial sector ownership. The decision to select the main Documentary (Muthu waruna / Gammadda) telecast between 6.00 to 7.00 PM as sample for content analysis was based on the intention to capture the development information available for viewing during prime time broadcasting. Mornings, daytime and the late nights are not preferred viewing times by many working Sri Lankans and specifically among communities living in the rural areas. .

Sampling Unit

This study involves two major sampling units related to content. The first category includes journalists working within the television industry in the capacity of producers, directors, involving content designing and dissemination functions in the documentary divisions. Television Producers therefore show heterogeneity in characteristics under study. The second category of the sampling unit included television Documentary items telecasted during the air time of two selected channels between 6.00 PM to 7 .00 PM., Content analyses through observation was conducted for six month of content telecast.

Data processing and analyzing

The data collected using questionnaires were cleaned and coded. Most of the answers were coded before administering the questionnaire; however few questions had open ended answers and the coding for such answers were developed after data collection. Instead of a separate codebook, edge coding was used as the data set was not so complicated. The coded data was entered in to the SPSS template prepared according to the coding.

Data collected using questionnaires were mainly categorical and therefore cross tabulations were the main statistical procedure used. The log linear tool was used to develop the final model. Cross tabulations and log linear are found to be best suited for analyzing the association of categorical variables (Field, 2010). The 'likelihood ratio' (LR) explains the variance between two categorical variables. Significant value indicated whether the statistics were obtained by chance. The general idea behind this theory is that collected data were used to create a model for which the probability of obtaining the observed set of data is maximized, and comparing this model to the probability of obtaining those data under the null hypothesis. The resulting statistic is, therefore, based on comparing observed frequencies with those predicted by the model with $P < .001$ indicating that a value of the test statistic is unlikely to have happened by chance, and therefore the strength of the relationship is significant.

Discussion

Sri Lankan media contributed enough to improve the knowledge of rural communities in order to improve participation and address rural poverty, whether the media has right attitudes and capacities to do so, and

whether competitive nature of the media environment encourage qualitative information provision in a significant manner are some issues that determine the development communication practices of the main stream television in Sri Lanka. In other words, development message framing depends a great deal on journalistic framing of development and how journalists frame development in turn depends on media cultures prevailing in the country such as media structures, practices, and capacities of journalists. Essentialists, organizational and professional cultures, and environmental and personal characteristics are some such factors that play an important role in forming a country's journalistic culture. Therefore organizational, essentialist and professional cultures and personal characteristics and environmental factors are studied in relation to attitudes of professional functions and development communication among journalists to understand the factors and conditions that are crucial in promoting development and rural poverty reduction in Sri Lanka.

The study includes only the relevant section such as documentaries, which produces content related to development excluding entertainment.

Table 1: Ideology of development

	Frequency	Percent
SA	40	66.6
A	15	25
NR	5	8.3
Total	60	100.0

Note: SA= Strongly Agreed; A= Agreed; NR= Not responded

In general, the media is believed to be highly politicized, and have lost the opportunity to develop a useful discourse on development issues of importance to the country. But political biases of the channels and perceptions on reporting political views to the audience. Television should have an agenda for development' are selected as the most relevant in studying the documentary culture in relation to reducing rural poverty.

Table 2: How to ownership help for the development agenda

Ownership	SA	A	DA	SD	Tot al
State	58.3	33.3	8.3	.0	100
Private	50	25	8.3	16.6	100

Note: SA=Strongly Agreed; A= Agreed; DA= Disagreed; SDA = Strongly Disagreed

Majority of producer from the state sector (58.3%) were strongly in favor of television having an agenda for development. Only 50% from the private sector were in favor of the opinion while 33.2% were against it. Taken disagreed and strongly disagreed together, In other words, a vast majority of state sector produces and private sector documentary producer have agreed to the statements that television can have development agenda. It is also possible that the journalists may have endorsed television agenda for development owing to its politically

inclined development reporting practices. Rupavahini is committed to air the development activities of the government which is a state-centered development approach inherits from the colonial history (Yapa, 1998).

Table 3: Visual representation of the rural poor in documentary

	Rupavahini		Sirasa	
Political	14	42.4%	16	59.2%
Elite	18	54.5%	10	37%
Rural	6	18.1%	12	44.4%
other	9	27.2%	8	29.6%
Total documentary	33		27	

In summary the lack of rural poor in visuals and over representation of elite and politicians show how development communication or certain public service efforts were hijacked by the political and social power schemes.

Conclusion & Recommendation

Reducing rural poverty and promoting development has been national priority that demands media to play a powerful role using its massive potential and popularity. Main proposition of the social responsibility theory is also to ascertain, that main obligation of the media is to the society. Therefore the media ownership is considered a public trust and documentary media expected to be truthful, accurate,

fair, objective and relevant. Therefore social theories of media provide provision to address the needs of the society. Priority was given to coverage of politically important events by both channels. Very little rural community representation was found in both channels. Contents of television documentary directly not relevant to fill the gap of knowledge about poverty To Improve the television output which will reduce the knowledge gaps among rural poor, improve participation and reduce rural poverty. Many reasons can be sighted for the underreporting of rural poverty. ‘Television can involve in reducing rural poverty’ is not endorsed by many journalist is manifested itself in the television content is one reason. Lack of government initiated discourse on rural poverty is one of the main reasons for media silence because government documentary refers to poverty in the progressive frame. Lack of all stakeholder involvement, lack of knowledge among producer, lack of professional reporting traditions in television, tradition of excessive political overtone and reactive documentary making practices are other common reasons.

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