



Current and future studies on participatory communication in Thailand



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ABSTRACT

Participatory communication is the core communication of the third paradigm (the multiplicity paradigm) of development. This paradigm focuses on people-centeredness in response to problem solving and the needs of people in different societies. Participatory communication has seen widespread usage over more than three decades. However, there is no standard rule nor are there specific media for implementation. This study intended to find out usage and the less studied issues on participatory communication in existing research in Thailand from 1993 to 2012 for future research. It was found that most research emphasized the areas of communication strategies, types and degrees of participation, and factors affecting people participation. The results also showed that participatory communication has rarely been found in the study of new media. Therefore, understanding how using participatory communication with new media remains a challenge in Thai research.

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Introduction

Participatory communication plays a very important role within the field of development. It is widely recognized after the failure of the modernization and the dependency paradigm. These paradigms consider development as knowledge transmission. Mass media are the main tool to convey messages from the center to the periphery in one-way communication. These have led to a few changes of development. For this reason, the new notion based on the people-centeredness paradigm of development was presented and participatory communication is the core concept of this paradigm.

A World Bank paper by Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009, p. 17) explained that “participatory communication is an approach based on dialog, which allows the sharing of

information, perceptions and opinions among the various stakeholders and thereby facilitates their empowerment, especially for those who are most vulnerable and marginalized.”

A UNICEF paper by Singhal (2001, p. 12) defined participatory communication as “a dynamic, interactional, and transformative process of dialog between people, groups, and institutions that enables people, both individually and collectively, to realize their full potential and be engaged in their own welfare.”

Therefore, participatory communication refers to two-way communication based on dialog between people, groups, and organizations, which empowers various stakeholders to equitably share and exchange information, knowledge, and experience.

However, participatory communication is flexible in its utilization. Van de Fliert (2010) pointed out that participatory communication is not a specific pattern. It can be applied and created to harmonize with context. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) suggested that strategic design for

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participatory communication should consider the evolution of media types, media levels, media nature, media institution, and the economic logic of media.

In Thailand, many scholars have used participatory communication as the framework for their studies. This study surveyed the ways to use participatory communication and media types in existing research in Thailand. In addition, this study focused on beneficial suggestions for future research in Thailand.

Background of Participatory Communication

Participatory communication is a part of development communication that is related to three eras of development: the modernization, dependency, and multiplicity paradigms. The developers of the modernization paradigm assumed that the cause of the underdevelopment originated from internal factors in each country that could be solved with the help of developed society (Servaes & Malikhao, 2008). On the other hand, the developers of the dependency paradigm believed that underdevelopment in countries in the Third World was a consequence of the developed society (Servaes, 1996). However, development communication in both paradigms occurs in the same way. Messages of the development program were via one-way communication from the center (Servaes, 1989, cited in Kaewthep, Louiyapong, Supasa, & Polnigongit, 2000).

In the multiplicity paradigm, another form of development appeared after the criticism of the two previous paradigms (Servaes, 2008). The main idea of this paradigm is based on people participation. Multiplicity's communication tool is the participatory model or bottom-up communication, while top-down communication or the diffusion model is the tool used in the modernization and dependency paradigms. Servaes (2008) concluded that the diffusion model uses persuasion patterns in one-way communication in order to change people's attitude and their behavior, while people under the participatory model are under the control of the developer.

Main Participatory Communication Principles

There are two main principles of participatory communication. One is the dialogical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, and the other is ideas about access, participation, and self-management of the UNESCO debates in the 1970s (Servaes, 1996).

Dialogical Pedagogy of Paulo Freire

There are five characteristics of Freire's dialog, which were explained by Cadiz (2005, pp. 147–149). **(1) Communication between equals.** This refers to the equality among all stakeholders. They can interchange the roles of the sender and receiver in two-way interaction. **(2) Problem-posing.** This refers to the developer, expert, or facilitator acting as a mediator to facilitate the members to discuss together, not a solution provider. **(3) Praxis, a cycle of action and reflection.** This refers to the translation of information into communication practice in development. **(4) Conscientizing.** This refers to the growing of all stakeholders in understanding human, social, and development

processes. **(5) Five values.** This refers to love, humility, hope, faith in development partners' capability, and critical thinking. Freire indicated that "true" dialog happens in a context of these values.

Ideas of UNESCO Debates in 1970s

The result of the UNESCO Debates on access, participation, and self-management was expressed by Jouet (1997, pp. 3–5). **(1) Access.** This refers to the opportunities available to people to become closer to communication systems as the chooser and feedback transmitter. **(2) Participation.** This refers to people participation in communication systems at the production, decision-making, and planning levels. **(3) Self-management.** This refers to the most advanced form of participation.

Methodology

This study used qualitative research involving a documentary analysis of the existing research in Thailand. In all, 60 research studies between 1993 and 2012 as shown in Table 1 were reviewed and analyzed for participatory communication usage and media types. These studies were classified by the purpose of participatory communication using: (1) studies focusing on participatory communication as the framework for participatory media, (2) studies focusing on participatory communication as the framework for communication strategies for people participation building, and (3) studies focusing on participatory communication as the framework for people participation in solving problems.

Findings

Current Studies on Participatory Communication in Thailand

The findings from the previous research in Thailand on participatory communication between 1993 and 2012 are discussed based on the different frameworks.

Studies Focusing on Participatory Communication as Framework for Participatory Media

Community Radio

Eight studies focused on community radio. Mainly, the studies examined the three roles of public participation: receiver, producer, and policy maker. The findings revealed that most people participated in radio programs as listeners, and informed problems, news and information within their community with radio producers, while a few people participated as producers and policy makers. People participated as producers in the form of radio presenters, participants in a show, and program planners. At the policy maker level, people were participants in meetings. Participation in determining policy on community radio management was decided by the staff of Radio Thailand because people in communities lacked personal skills in policy management.

Four studies also found that the level of public participation depended on elements of communication: sender, receiver, channel, and message. The reasons for people's

Table 1
List of reviewed studies

| Category | Number of studies |
|--|--|
| 1. Studies focusing on participatory communication as framework for participatory media | |
| Community radio | 8 [Saenmuangchin (2000), Pilun–Owad (2001), Youngkitkarn (2002), Sukkosol (2004), Intarapimon (2005), Pongmas (2006), Nusong (2006), Hinthao (2006)] |
| Problem solving radio | 3 [Waranichsakul (1993), Yanwithyakul (1998), Kasemsri (2006)] |
| Internet | 2 [Chatwaree (2009), Sroisri (2011)] |
| Television | 3 [Kadnak, Kumseesung, Pansri, and Phompuang (2005), Chinakul (2006), Nonthihathai (2008)] |
| 2. Studies focusing on participatory communication as framework for communication strategies for people participation building | 33 [Karnsungnoen (2006), Milinhangoon (2006), Khemapetch (2007), Noppakun (2008), Kongkha (2008), Hinthao, Selakorn, Lertsuvanpisan, Iamsa-ard, and Thongyaem (2010), Teeraputtigunchai, Wongmhuenrat, Suntornphesuch, and Suphachan (2011), Wongluksanapan (1999), Suksawang (2012), Intaratat, Krutmeechai, Chaiviratana, Hongrat, and Thiengnoi (2004), Kanarkard (1998), Hongrat (2007), Saetan and Kongwut (2010), Leeratanapanich (2005), Lapkern (2005), Patano (2006), Junlamakorn (2007), Kumchaythong (2009), Srihakulung (2009), Dangsaisir (2005), Duangkhamawat and Sriwongpan (2005), Buraphadecha (2006), Karnsungnoen (2006), Phuto (2008), Boonsodagon (2011), Phuntulee and Wanitchanont (2012), Lila (2005), Chalukan (2008), Thippharat (2011), Hinthao, Sinsakham, Lertsuvanpisan, and Pothihang (2012), Malivong (2005), Kittiwarakul (2011), Charnchakritpong (2000)] |
| 3. Studies focusing on participatory communication as framework for people participation in solving problem | 11 [Isrhasenee (2006), Sriburin (2007), Nantamontry (2001), Rojanasupot, Inthajakra, and Chaikhunp (2004), Thewaterarat, Chedjinda, Chaisuwan, Khotpun, and Munpolsri (2004), Sittiphan (2009), Teeraputtigunchai (2010), Nasomsong (2011), Sriphetcharawut (2006), Uthayarat and Kaewpraadub (2012), Riwsuwan (2003)] |

participation were to receive benefits and the opportunity to present their views and suggestions.

Problem-Solving Radio

Three studies focused on mass media in the form of problem-solving radio. The program format allowed people to phone in to share and discuss information with the radio presenter. Waranichsakul (1993) revealed that there were three parties involved in the production: the presenter of the radio program, policemen from the traffic control center, and the people. Each of them took turns in their roles as reporters, sources, and audience, respectively. Kasemsri's finding (2006) revealed that people participated in information sharing, consultation, decision making, joint activity, donation, seeking help, and returning lost and reporting found items from passengers. Moreover, Yanwithyakul's findings (1998) showed that the station really listened to what people had to say and used their opinions in the guideline for the station's operation. Yanwithyakul (1998) also found that factors affecting participation were the program content related to the social and political context at that time, horizontal relationships, strong support from the station leader and radio presenter, and the ease of connection with the station.

Internet

There were only two studies which focused on new media. Chatwaree (2009) used new media in the form of a school internet radio program and found that students participated as receivers and producers. Sroisri (2011) used new media in the form of a website in collaboration with learning and found that students participated as senders, receivers, and planners.

Television

The three studies focusing on television can be divided into two groups: television in the form of community media, and mass media. Both aimed at levels and factors of public participation. They found that people could participate in a television program as a receiver and producer

only, whereas policy making and production plans were not allowed. As a producer, people participated in the pre-production and production stages, while participation in the post-production stage was not allowed. In the pre-production stage, people provided information, chose program topics, collected data, wrote scripts, and cast the performers. At the production stage, people participated as guests, lecturers, interviewees, location staff, property staff, costumers, performers, main hosts, and field hosts.

These studies also found that there were many factors affecting people participation dependent on the program type. For social problem-solving programs, Chinakul (2006) revealed that internal factors affecting people participation were easy access to and an interesting program format and content, moderator's communication skills, credit, honesty in helping, and response to the needs of the community, while external factors consisted of the difficulty in dealing with government agencies, desire for a peaceful society, and crisis situations. For teenage programs, Nonthihathai (2008) reported that the policy of the television producer, production team, time, youth knowledge and experience, and production budget affected youth participation.

Studies Focusing on Participatory Communication as Framework for Communication Strategies for People Participation Building

The thirty three studies in this group investigated communication strategies, participant types, and factors affecting participants. There were various formats for the communication strategies in these studies. They depended on the communication objectives, situation, community size, communicators, senders, messages, media activities and target groups. Communication through personal media was the most popular. A secondary strategy was using both formal and informal communication as well as various media.

There were several types of people participation. The majority of these studies reported that people participated in planning and implementation, respectively. The factor

most affecting people participation was people's awareness of values and the benefits of activities. A secondary factor was strong relationships among people.

Studies Focusing on Participatory Communication as Framework for People Participation in Solving Problem

The 11 studies in this group could be divided into two groups: individual and community participation. Regarding individual participation, two studies found that each person participated in joining activities, follow up and evaluation, news following, making decisions, and obtaining the benefits. Most people participated in follow up and evaluation. Both studies also found that knowledge about the activities and individual behavior for information receiving were factors affecting individual participation.

The nine studies relating to community participation revealed that people participated in every process of solving problem: problem definition, planning, operation, and follow up and evaluation processes. The majority of factors affecting people participation in these studies were effective communication leaders. Secondary factors were interpersonal communication and messages related to daily-life issues. On the other hand, the research of Thewaterarat et al. (2004) reported that the constraints of participatory communication came from the lack of proper communication channels, adverse political influence, poor cooperation within community, no communication leadership, inaccessible message, insufficient communication skills, untrue participation, and low morale and motivation. They also found that the overview of communication strategies for solving problems started with: (1) raising awareness of the problems by core leadership or affected people, (2) expanding problem-related information to others within the community, face-to-face, (3) sharing opinions among people within the community by meeting and via a public forum, (4) expanding problem-related information outside the community for creating a partnership network, and (5) implementation and follow up and evaluation.

Moreover, Rojanasupot et al. (2004) indicated that the community was a communication center. People communicated within the community during the crisis. However, after the crisis, there was only informal interpersonal communication. Riwsuwan (2003) also revealed that campaigns in which community members took part could resolve the problem better than outside organizations did alone. However, problem solving could not be successful unless there was cooperation between outside organizations and community members.

Future Study

Further studies should focus more on new media because their characteristics are related to the core idea of participatory communication. Media scholars stated that new media consisted of many characteristics such as digital, convergence, hypermedia, virtual, and interactivity (Flew, 2005; Friedman & Friedman, 2008; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2009). The key characteristic that supports the concept of participatory communication is interactivity. Flew (2005) noted that this characteristic

separates new media from old media. Lister et al. (2009) indicated that old media make people a passive audience, while new media make people powerful users through interactivity. Friedman and Friedman (2008) explained that today's audience also can contribute content such as generating message, editing videos, and posting to blogs. Lister et al. (2009) concluded this change with the view that the "audience of new media becomes a user rather than the 'viewer' or 'reader' of traditional media."

These scholars' explanations support the people-centeredness concept of participatory communication. Moreover, they also support the UNESCO idea of participatory communication that people can participate as the chooser, the producer, the decision-maker, and the planner of communication systems. In addition, interactivity also supports equality of communication between the new media users. Kioussis (2002) indicated that interactivity enables all individuals to interchange their roles as the sender and the receiver. According to Freire's idea, equality of communication is one of the characteristics of participatory communication. Thus, new media were suitable for this communication, especially social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Social networking sites arise from the development of Web 2.0 technology. Brussee and Hekman (2009) stated that Web 2.0 provides a higher degree of interactivity than Web 1.0. It also provides a convenient platform for two-way communication of social networking sites. This enables users to create and share their information. That means this technology also empowers users to be communication controllers. Therefore, it supports the main characteristics of the participatory model explained by Servaes (2008) that as part of this model, people are the controlling participants for development. Moreover, the technology of such media also provides a platform of collaboration through the online community (Friedman & Friedman, 2008) being people who are connected on the basis of similar interests (Banbersta, 2010). Hence, people who are problem owners, or are affected by or interested in the problem, by solving the problem in their community can begin to generate their content in order to express their needs. They also exchange their knowledge, skills, and experiences with each other in order to find out the best solution for problem solving that suits their community. These media features confirm that social networking sites are media suitable for participatory communication.

Conclusion

In summary, participatory communication can take many different forms. It can be designed to suit different contexts. Previous research in Thailand that employed participatory communication to be a framework of study can be divided into two groups: study of the investigation of the role of media as community media, and study of the design of participatory communication as tools for solving problems or community development. Both of these contexts focused on three topics: (1) communication strategies, (2) types and degrees of participation, and (3) factors affecting the people participation.

These studies also found that there were a variety of media studies: (1) community media in the form of person media, community radio, community television, news broadcasting tower, and wire broadcasting, (2) mass media in the form of radio and television, and (3) new media in the form of the internet radio and websites. However, there were only two studies, which focused on new media, one on internet radio by Chatwaree (2009) and the other on websites by Sroisri (2011).

Moreover, it also was found that interactivity is the main characteristic of new media that supports the participatory communication concept: people-centeredness, accessing, equality of communication, communication controller, and collaboration notion.

However, understanding how participatory communication reacts to solve social problems or community development remains a challenge in Thai society, especially for new media in the form of social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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