

AGRICULTURAL RADIO TALKS AND DRAMA: MALAYSIA EARLY DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCE

FADZILAH YUSOF
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

FARIDAH IBRAHIM & WAN AMIZAH WM
UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

Abstract

Agricultural broadcast has played a vital role towards Malaysian agricultural development. The article discusses the use of radio talks and dramas in developing the agricultural industry in Malaysia. The study applied qualitative method, namely document analysis, in-depth interview and content analysis of radio dramas such as Kebun Pak Awang (Pak Awang's Garden) and Kemajuan Kampung (Village's Progress). The study found that in the early years, agricultural extension services are limited through agricultural agencies which serve the needs of colonials on commodity plantation such as rubber, cocoa and pepper. Government development plans and strategies were inserted within the radio drama, talk or entertainments to gain peoples interest and collaboration. After the independence of Malaysia the agencies responsibilities were widen to help rural peasants to improve their yields by using technologies and new breeds in their fields.

Keywords: *agricultural broadcast, radio talks and dramas, agricultural development, Kebun Pak Awang, Kemajuan Kampung*

BUAL CARA RADIO DAN DRAMA PERTANIAN: PENGALAMAN PEMBANGUNAN AWAM DI MALAYSIA

Abstrak

Penyiaran pertanian memainkan peranan penting dalam pembangunan negara Malaysia. Makalah ini membincangkan penggunaan rancangan bual cara dan drama radio dalam membangunkan industri pertanian di Malaysia. Kajian ini menerapkan kaedah kualitatif, iaitu analisis dokumen, temu bual mendalam dan analisis kandungan drama radio seperti *Kebun Pak Awang* dan *Kemajuan Kampung*. Kajian mendapati pada peringkat awal, perkhidmatan pengembangan pertanian terhad pada agensi pertanian yang memenuhi keperluan penjajah bagi ladang komoditi seperti getah, koko dan lada hitam. Rancangan dan strategi pembangunan kerajaan diselitkan di dalam rancangan drama, temu bual atau hiburan radio, bagi menarik minat dan kerjasama orang ramai. Selepas kemerdekaan Malaysia, agensi yang dipertanggungjawabkan semakin diperluas bagi membantu petani luar bandar menambah baik hasil tanaman dengan menggunakan teknologi dan benih baru di ladang dan sawah mereka.

Kata kunci: *penyiaran pertanian, rancangan bual cara dan drama radio, pembangunan pertanian, Kebun Pak Awang, Kemajuan Kampung*

Introduction

Radio talks and drama has boost up the development of Malaysia in the early years after the defeat of Japanese invasion. Government development plan and strategy are inserted within the radio drama, talk or entertainments to gain peoples interest and collaboration.

These methods have played as major tools towards Malaysian early development. In the early years, agricultural extension services are limited through agricultural agencies which serve the needs of colonials on commodity plantation such as rubber, cocoa and pepper. After the independence of Malaysia the agencies responsibilities are widen to help rural peasant to improve their yields by using technologies and new breeds in the field.

On the later years the authority realize on the power of mass media, and fully utilized it in inserting message of development through drama radio series, Bangsawan and talk shows that significantly change people perception, attitude

and value.

Literature review

The role of mass media for development in developing countries has attracted a lot of intention from scholars, politicians and communication practitioners. The works of Lerner (1958), Schramm (1964), McClelland (1961), Pye (1963) and Rogers (1969) have molded the early theory and practice of utilizing mass media for national development (In Md Salleh 2008:23). These scholars, with their dictum of modernization, believed that mass media are powerful agents of change. Malaysia has also undergoes the same phase, experience by most developing countries.

The development of mass media was a crucial factor in the transition from an absolutist regime to liberal-democratic society. Mass media today is about culture, individual identities are formed by various forces of socialization, the choices individuals and group makes and how they react to these forces are also influencing. Media as a powerful and influencing tool in today's world is not only providing and transmitting texts, greater than that as an agent of change in various aspects such as economy, politic, social, value and culture (Habermas 1962). New encounters and experiences mean the self-image is constantly re-constructed, and the media is a crucial source of symbolic material, in that window on the world will impinge on how people perceive the world (Habermas 1962).

Rural broadcasting in Malaysia started during the emergency period of 1948-1960 (Isamudin Ahmad 1981). Rural broadcast at the time serves as the government's weapon in the emergency of fighting the communist insurgents. Special service known as the emergency division were set up to produce programs for rural population to resist communist propaganda. This service was later transmitted as community and rural broadcast, which aims to form a link between rural population, including the farmers, mine workers and rubber plantation labors with the government, in addition to the interment and information (Isamudin Ahmad 1981).

Guimary (1974) in his study in formational campaigns in Malaysia states that one of the most effective communication channels to promote developments and achieve national goals is the mass media. Among the mass media, radio has been the most widely used medium in development project in Malaysia during independent years. Fraser (1981) argues that radio can be very useful for spreading knowledge about successful development and self help initiatives. Radio sets were distributed to community centers, especially in sensitive areas of the newly resettles Chinese villages and rubber plantation, whom chronicled the development of rural broadcasting service of Radio Television Malaysia in serving the needs of the farmers, fisherman and the public, on issues pertaining to agriculture (Md Salleh & Musa 2005). Sargent (1976) too found that the most trusted information source is radio and television compared to other media.

Another study by Sargent (1975) on information on flow pattern in villages of rural Malaysia, reaffirmed the significance of radio as a source of information among the Malays, who have the largest range of materials available in their own language. Non Malay groups tended to make more use of radio for music.

Methodology

This research used numerous of documentation research, from various government document, plan and archive reports. In-depth interviews are used to justify the effect and impact of messages conveyed. Radio drama are reviewed and the researcher interpreted the message and content of the drama in semiotic and psychological aspect, to understand the policy and message conveyed by the government to the masses, which in turn leads to the country's development.

Government Gazettes, Policy Trust, Malaysian Plan and any form of documentation that could help to do justice on the fact that being used in this research are contended enumerately.

Findings and interpretation

A Success Story of Radio Drama: *Kebun Pak Awang*

The government used the power of mass media to insert message of development through drama radio series, *Bangsawan* and talk show that significantly change people perception, attitude and value by using a role model in the drama.

Generally the drama will used a wise respected man as a major actor whom handle problem around his society wisely, as indicated in social learning theory by Bandura (1977) one person can acquire new responses simply by observing the behavior of another person (the model). This observation is called imitation. Many social responses are learned through imitations. The radio dramas produced, had a different social background such as in FELDA scheme, the story revolved are the challenges and solution made within the society. The drama also became good tools in spreading new policies, subsidies, message and solution of their problem by the government.

In 1956, a series of radio acting was started called 'Kebun Pak Awang'. According to Dol Ramli (1981) a former producer of RTM, the idea to develop this program was based on his experience when he was in Australia where there was a popular program that was broadcasted. The program was called 'Blue hills' and it had 80% entertainment, 10% education and 10% motivation. The first person to publish and write the script for this program was Murtadza Za'ba (Murtadza Za'ba 1967).

Kebun Pak Awang or *Pak Awang's Garden* is a half hour dramatized serial broadcast only in the Malay language designed primarily for the rural listener. It is intended to be informative as well as entertaining for both rural and urban listeners covering age group ranging from 8 to 80. To make it interesting it

has to be humorous and entertaining, to make it informative it has to contain information most needed by the rural listeners, and to make it educational it has to contain advice, guide and tips injected indirectly in the course of the various dialogues in the program. It is an attempt to increase farmers production and improve their standard of living by using modern methods of production to instill in them the spirit of self reliance; to persuade them to utilize fully all the facilities provided by the government and to urge them to initiate their own effort by which they may improve themselves; to discuss social problem in relation to their standard of living and to combat the influence of out dated ideas and belief; to instill in their minds that the farm is a complete economic unit by which they can achieve advancement, and above all, through Kebun Pak Awang it attempt to instill in their minds, the pride to be tillers of the land (Dol Ramli, 1981).

Original Story

Using a typical Malay rural family as a basis for putting out ideas, problems and information, this weekly serial has so far succeeded in arousing the interest not only of the rural listeners but also of the urban listeners, both young and old. The original serial has been modified to keep pace with the consciousness of the farmers that there exists a radio broadcast tailored specially for them. An average of seven characters were used in the original program. The main character, a broad minded and understanding middle aged father supposed to be poor of hearing. Then there is the mother (talkative), a young intelligent daughter of 20 years old, and an inquisitive son of eight. Then there is a young couple who live in the adjoining plot of land. They depict characters often found among the Malay community who prefer to take things as they come along, always hoping that god will bless them but never making any attempt to better themselves. Finally an agriculturist who is a lecturer at the college of agriculture, Serdang, and happen to be an uncle of the family. That was Kebun Pak Awang serial in the original form (Dol Ramli, 1981).

Murtadza Za'ba return from the United Kingdom after three year attachment with the BBC and he was taken up by the popular serial of "the Archere" and had been following it closely. When the director of radio returns from Australia, he too spoke of the excellent achievement made by the Australian broadcasting commission in farm broadcasting. He took the queue from here and started sorting out ideas as to how best to peculiar needs of the country. At first it was a losing battle. Those he spoke to were not convinced that it could work. It needed the support of agricultural expert to include the 'know how' in order to say the right thing at the right time. But rural listeners were then not ready to accept.

The full impact of rural broadcasts

Radio was perhaps considered as a medium only for providing entertainment, information and news just like the press. It took about six months before manage

to form a clear picture that it should need, an entertaining entertainment program for all types of listeners, not merely confined to farmers, while at the same time providing farmers with useful information, tips and advice indirectly for a start. Then it had the problem of poor radio reception in the rural areas and finding the right time to put it on the air. This problem was overcome simply by putting it at the peak period of 8.30pm and the unorthodox method of making the main character as short of hearing paid dividends. While it was entertaining it served the purpose of repeating certain words which were normally difficult to understand especially on the air and gave an excuse to repeat many points. After a few months of broadcast letters of appreciation started pouring in. Many gave suggestions on how to improve it, and soon more suggestions poured in asking for the program to be repeated, suggesting better time and so on (Murtadza Za'ba 1967).

Strangely enough these came mainly from listeners in the urban area. This was perhaps because the ratio of information to that entertainment was 5% to 95% and therefore, farmers regarded the program as an entertainment. However, the department of agriculture stepped in, realizing the importance of the program in educating and informing the farmers and after having heard the impact it had, the department of agriculture began to support it openly and to offer valuable advice, consequently the program became established.

The program- its contents to be more specific-became convincing by the fact that it used actual names for the various characters. This helped the participants feel that they were the real characters. With the exception of the two, all the characters in the series bore the artist's own name. This has helped acting to be more natural than would otherwise have been. Even location names are actual. This did the trick and the program has become to be so realistic (Murtadza Za'ba 1967). This program has been on the air for almost of 9 years without a real break. There had been a few post moments in putting the program on the air at the specified time due to programs of national importance, but it has never been taken off the air for any length of time (Murtadza Za'ba 1967).

According to Abdul Majid Kayat (1981), this program increased in popularity and that was one of the effective programs for the rural areas. The effect of the program was that the government felt that there should be more programs that are fixed and specifically targeting a group of listeners. Because of that, in 1961, the government established a unit which was called the Rural Unit.

Radio programs during post Emergency period

When the Emergency was officially ended on the 31st of July 1960, the government focused their energy and tools towards nation building. A ministry was established called the Rural Development Ministry and had announced their policy to launch programs aimed at developing rural areas and these programs were given a higher priority compared to other government programs (National Archives 1975:2).

More money was channeled to the department of broadcasting. The introduction of very high frequency transmission (VHF) facilitated better transmission between stations. Radio sets became more miniaturized and cheap. This further facilitated listening habits. This period was filled with strong enthusiasm, from the staff as well as the listeners. Station broadcast became more competitive and responses to the program were good and encouraging. Beside that, the radio service also receives many constructive public criticisms.

The standard of broadcasting improved very much. This is because by this time the staffs were senior and had gathered vast experience.

Programs aired

In the post Emergency period, programs were categorized under different sections. They were:

- a. Drama / talks
- b. Musical and line stage production
- c. News
- d. Spot announcement/ Commercial advertisements
- e. Features

Talks and features program were relayed from stations between Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Singapore. Penang produced its own regional program too. Programs were then grouped under the English service, Malay service , Chinese service and the Indian service.

Dol Ramli (a former journalist and RTM director) stated in unpublished document at RTM in 1956, when he was in Australia he met John Douglas (the director of the Australia Farm Broadcasting Corporation). He said that Malaysia is almost similar to Australia where both countries had their economies based on agriculture and that broadcasting should focus on agriculture.

Radio Development Programs

Between the years 1960-62, a new program called ‘Kemajuan Kampong’ that spoke about plans for development was launched. Later there was a red book plan program, published in accordance of “Projek Buku Merah” by Tun Abdul Razak (a former Malaysian Prime Minister), besides producing programs related to producers visits to various areas with Tun Abdul Razak.

The program ‘Kemajuan Kampong’ was aired 3 or 4 times a week in the evenings. The program were produced by Ismail Hashim at where ever he is or while following Tun Abdul Razak. If Tun was in Johor, the program was recorded in Johor and then channeled to Kuala Lumpur. This was due to the lack of staff available.

In terms of facilities, he said that in the early stages, the equipments used

were old and outdated. At that time the recording equipment used was the TWO B which was a small machine that could only be used for 15 minutes at a time. Therefore, if Tun Abdul Razak gave a speech that was longer than 15 minutes, he was asked to pause to enable a tape change.

Before 1961, the programs for rural areas were aired whenever there was a material. After the establishment of the Rural Broadcasting Unit in 1961, a fixed schedule was made with the focus on the development of agriculture and rural areas because their importance was significant (Department of Broadcasting, 1961).

The situation above began in January 1st 1961, when Tun Abdul Razak launched a new radio program on the development of rural areas. Among the reasons the unit was established was that the government realized the importance of developing agriculture and rural areas for the countries economy.

In the first quarter of the year, the news and program divisions maintained their priority to cover activities in rural areas. Priority was given to that ministry. All language division started a series of organized programs specifically for that purpose.

The Radio Department trained main officers for posts at the newly established Rural Broadcasting Unit. Three officers which have experience in agriculture and news were taken by the Radio Department to manage radio programs targeting the rural sector.

Starting from 1961, Malay services increased their broadcasting frequency, particularly the programs on the development of rural areas to three times a week. These broadcasts contained programs that was specifically made to cover the past development on rural areas such as 'Kebun Pak Awang' and 'Long and Ngah'.

The effect of this was that the Malay services launched a series of reports that lasted for 15 minutes that was named 'Pemberita Kita' that was broadcasted 6 times a week. It contained news recordings, speeches, views and interviews from the whole country that was recorded (Radio Department 1961).

Following the launch of the second stage of the rural development campaign for the whole country, the fourth quarter of 1961 was the busiest time for the Rural Unit, Radio Malaysia Rural Unit. Important measures were taken in a few districts to focus on quickening the development projects. The Rural Broadcasting staffs had to travel the whole country to cover various activities of the deputy prime minister Tun Abdul Razak Hussein who frequently traveled around the country. The materials obtained were used in programs such as 'Siaran Kampong ke Kampong', 'Forward the Country' and 'Pemberita Kita'. Home gardening and agricultural slots became more popular among both the listeners from the cities and rural areas.

According to Abdul Majid Kayat (1981), it was in the year 1962 that 4 programs were broadcasted in a week where the first series was called 'Siaran Kemajuan Kampong' and was broadcasted every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from

6.15 to 6.30pm for 15 minutes. Besides that, the program 'Halaman Pertanian' was aired every Tuesday from 7.30-8pm.

This unit worked closely with the Ministry of Rural Development especially with the adult class branch. An advisory committee was established with the headquarters based in the Ministry of Agriculture where it was represented by head of departments who was involved with economic and social development to outline a guide to radios on the issues that should be aired and ways to obtain responses.

Due to that, the government carried out adult's classes between 4-5pm and 8-9pm while Radio Malaya aired adult education programs from 4.45-5pm with repeats at 8.45-9pm. Therefore when it was nearing the time for the broadcast of the adult education programs, teachers teaching in the adult classes would announce to the students that they would be tuning in to the radio and the radio that was provided would then be switched on (Abdul Majid Kayat 1981). The Asian Foundation provided 1540 radios for the adult classes.

Following this, Tun Abdul Razak in a speech given at the opening of a course in radio at Radio Malaya on the 1st of April 1962 said...

"Starting from tomorrow evening, the Ministry of Rural Development will launch a series of radio courses for adult classes. This course covers and focuses on issues regarding extension services. I believe that with this course, students in the adult classes will get a chance to know and overcome their day to day problems".

(Tun Abdul Razak Hussien Speech 1967. National Archives, 1978)

In 1964, the focus of the contents that were aimed at rural listeners was about campaigns to grow fruit crops. It was a government effort that was in concordance with agricultural activities where a few state carried out agricultural competitions which cumulated in the MAHA expo (Radio Department, 1964).

In 1965 the programs targeted to rural audiences are fisheries and agriculture development. Priority has been given to "Padi Mahsuri", "Pukat Runda", land development produce, irrigation projects which cost \$15 million and industrial development in Malaysia. In 1965 programs for rural areas also content practical aspect of agriculture and development.

In 1966, the Rural Broadcasting services expanded their services by establishing a Northern Rural Broadcasting division in Pulau Pinang to start trial broadcasting in rural areas. This plan obtained great success. This plan was carried out in accordance with the launch of the MADA project and also to solve local problems. Among the programs aired in Pulau Pinang was the Rural Development program that was carried out using the Northern accent and also the drama 'Kebun Pak Sahak'. Pak Sahak was a real man and even though he was already old, he was a successful farmer.

Conclusion

Malaysia has progress herself from a colonized country to a develop nation today. It was not an easy task to gather collaboration and participation from all citizens. The multi races, cultures and different perception make it harder for the authority to congregate every one into the same mission. Especially after a hard life during Japanese invasion and unbalances of economic segregations. Yet Malaysia has complimented these differences as strength to develop the country. Radio are used as an effective medium to instill a motivation, collaboration and development skills needed, as well government plan and agenda to the masses. All these aspects are carefully inserted through radio drama, talks and entertainments programs on radio. The history has proven the steps taken has succeeded in making the country and the people a develop nation today.

About the authors

Ms Fadzilah Yusof is a lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia, Bintulu Branch, Sarawak, specializing in communication studies. She is currently undertaking her PhD at the School of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Associate Professor *Dr Faridah Ibrahim* and *Dr Wan Amizah WM* are lecturers at the same School.

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