THE COMMUNICATIVE POTENTIALS OF 'HALWA' OF BERTA COMMUNITY AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR PUBLIC RELATION PRACTICES: BENISHANGUL GUMUZ HEALTH BUREAU IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

Using a word of oral communication as a means of face-to-face communication is a very ancient tradition but still keeps serving particularly in traditional communities and as an alternative medium of communication by the advanced ones as well. Commonly, information ranging from rumors and gossip to truthful and timely accounts of events is disseminated through this medium. However, the quality and reliability of information exchanged through such a medium depends on the social value attached to the overall process and of the individual communicator. Besides, using mother tongue language has reliability and acceptability than using secondary languages and modern media platforms (ibid).

KEYWORDS: *Communicative Potentials, 'Halwa', Public Relation Practices*

INTRODUCTION

Ansu-Kyeremeh (1998) defined indigenous media as "any form of indigenous communication system which, by virtue of its origin from/and integration into a specific culture, serves as a channel for messages in a way and manner that requires the utilization of the values, symbols, institutions and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes". Cited in Enoch Kwame (2011)

Africans together with their development partners have often tended to extrapolate communication models from the developed world and apply them wholesale in local environments Mushengyezi (2003). However, most of these foreign communication strategies often do not impact on the rural masses for which they are meant because they are not "contextualized" to the local settings, their cultural dialects, and their worldview (Mundy & Lloyd-Laney, 1992).

Using a word of oral communication as a means of face-to-face communication is a very ancient tradition but still keeps serving particularly in traditional communities and as an alternative medium of communication by the advanced ones as well. Commonly, information ranging from rumors and gossip to truthful and timely accounts of events is disseminated through this medium. However, the quality and reliability of information exchanged through such a medium depends on the social value attached to the overall process and of the individual communicator. Besides, using mother tongue language has reliability and acceptability than using secondary languages and modern media platforms (ibid).

Effective communication services assist Indigenous people to achieve a range of social, cultural, and economic goals and improve access to justice. However, traditional Indigenous practices have been weakened over time and mainstream services are underutilized by, and often ineffective with, Indigenous people. Indigenous people at the local

level need to be involved in the design and delivery of dispute resolution, and conflict management services, information exchange directed to them, and services need to take into account Indigenous perspectives on disputes and their resolution. Customary and western practices overlap and, although customary processes can be supported in some instances, new Indigenous-specific services and practices may be required to address contemporary problems Paul M and Megan L. (1992).

Clearly, it is possible to say that Indigenous communication has value in its own right, has a wide range of coverage, has high credibility, and is an important conduit of change, and finally, it offers opportunities for participation by local people in development efforts. Although they have their own limitations, they remain valuable to marginalized and less developed community of people even in the face of modernity and scientific discoveries.

Statement of the Problem

Most of the communication media within Africa are urban oriented, whereas the development programs of most African countries are rural oriented. The majority of the population has not even made a telephone call in their lives. (World Bank, 2000). Irregular or non-existent electricity supplies further compound these problems. In 1998, the average electricity consumption in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa was less than one-tenth that in developed countries (UNDP, 2001) cited in Nyasha, M (2001).But often we forget another type of communication - or indigenous, exchange of information among people (Haverkort et Al., (2003).

The UN System Task Team on the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda acknowledges the importance of indigenous knowledge for environmental sustainability, stating that "traditional and indigenous knowledge, adaptation and coping strategies can be major assets for local response strategies" (2012, p.28) cited in Giorgia,M(2016). Therefore, in light of the new post-2015 sustainability agenda, it is essential to explore the linkages between sustainable development, indigenous communication, and indigenous knowledge, intended here as local knowledge of indigenous communities having its own epistemology and scientific validity and not as an opposite to western knowledge.

Indigenous communication does not occur through newspapers, radio, or extension organizations. It is made within families, at the village's gatherings, in the market place, or at the water well. Based up on the pre-research assessment, the researchers found the problems of little effort have, therefore, been made to develop indigenous modes of communication, replacement of indigenous communication by external systems, the survival of much valuable information, and of the local culture itself, is in danger within the stated area.

Although the traditional media that public relations experts use and that provides an effective tool to communicate with development problems in rural areas, it has not been properly articulated in the mainstream development process. Hence, an attempt at communicating modern scientific and technological information to the rural people on rural development often results in the failure of such projects.

The characteristics of the sources, messages, channels, recipients, and feedback involved in the process of communicating with rural communities need to be examined to see how they can be made more appropriate. A careful examination of rural areas will show that rural people are exposed to quite a lot of information, but the problem, however, is whether the information reaching them is reliable and organized in such a way as to achieve defined objectives.

Kyeremeh (1997) and Malik (1982) attempted to research traditional forms of communication in Ghana and India, respectively. Kyeremeh (1997) focused on the role of indigenous communication systems to link the overall media strategies for education and development projects in a rural situation, While Malik (1982) sought to investigate the potential of folk media as channels of communication.

One local study was conducted on the communicative potential of 'DAGU' indigenous communication in Ethiopia; particularly in Afar region. The study investigated the communicative potential of 'DAGU' indigenous communication in Afar for prevention of HIV/AIDS Gulilat (2006). Even if 'DAGU' is an indigenous communication, it does not mean that similar with Halwaof Berta community. The researchers depicted Dagu is a major means of communication for rural people that can be a foundation for dialogue, discussion, debate, or questions, nicely adapted to any HIV/AIDS communication approach.

In Ethiopia's context, there are some basic problems which can deter the effective and efficient use of modern media outlets for social development. Ethiopia Media and Telecoms Landscape guide (2011) United Kingdom support report shows that most people who live in the countryside are too poor to afford a TV set, less than 1% of Ethiopians have access to the internet. Radio is the main source of news and information in Ethiopia, especially in the rural areas where 80% of the population lives. However, many people in the countryside simply rely on word of mouth, particularly what they hear at community meetings or through their local church or mosque. These kinds of information may be effective if they are used as public relations practices.

According to the electronic survey report of Bremer (2016), there are no radio or television programs known to exist in the Berta language. This shows that, in Berta community there are no modern media outlets that help public relations to convey their message, almost no electric power availability. The region also exists at the border line and less attention to hear media programs due to the lack of programs transmitting in their language. Thus, a Halwa- traditional form of communication still serves the rural communities as a public relations tools.

The essential information outlet on development and socio-economic issues for the rural communities is the indigenous forms of communication which is used as a communication tool to disseminate timely information. Otherwise, there would be a substantial communication gap between the modernized elite sector and the wide community who live in peasant villages. Thus, to the researchers' knowledge regarding to the communicative Halwa and the implication for public relations practice, no investigation has been made to alleviate the above problems. Hence, the researchers explored the communicative potential of Halwa and the implication forpublic relations practice in Health bureau of BenishangulGumuz Regional State.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to explore the existing communicative potential of "Halwa", and its implication for public relations practice in Berta community of BenishangulGumuze Region.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The Research Tried To

- Examine the role of Halwacommunication system of Berta to facilitate public relations practice.

- Identify the communicative potentials of Halwawith the modern public relations tools currently used by health bureaus in the Berta community.
- Identify how public relations practitioners' employ Halwain their public relations practices?
- Investigate its challenges in today's status quo to share different traditional communication experiences.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Descriptions of the Study Area

Benishangul-Gumuz National Regional State (BGNRS) is one of the nine regional states established in 1994 by the new constitution of Ethiopia that created a federal system of governance. Previously the southern part of BGNRS belonged to Wollega while the area above the Abay River to Gojjam.

The region is located in the western part of the country between 09.170 - 12.060 North latitude and 34.100-37.040 East longitude. The region has international boundary with the Sudan and south Sudan in the West and is bordered by the Amara region in the North and Northeast, Oromiya in the Southeast and South. The regional capital, Assosa is located at a distance of 687 km west of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia.

The region has a total area of approximately 50,380 km2 with altitude ranging from 580 to 2,731 meters above sea level (m.a.s.l.). BGR is divided into 3 administrative zones and 21 'districts' (administrative unit equivalent to district).

The 2007 census indicates that there are 183,259 speakers found in Ethiopia (Central Statistics Agency of Ethiopia). While there are no official figures available, many Berta who frequently cross the border into Sudan report that there is a comparable number of Berta living in Sudan as well; however, this assessment far exceeds the projected figures in the Ethnologies which estimate only 20,000 Sudanese Berta (Lewis 2009) cited in Semene B,(2014). The vast majority of Ethiopian Berta is subsistence farmers living within the borders of the Benishangul-Gumuz Region. Islam is the religion of the masses, and Sudanese Arabic is spoken as a second language by many.

Based on their languages, "the five indigenous" ethnic groups in their order of population number are Berta (26.7 percent), Gumuz (23.4 percent), Shinasha (7.0 percent), Mao (0.6 percent) and Komo (0.2 percent). Significant numbers of Amhara (22.2 percent), Oromo (12.8 percent) and others (7.1 percent) also reside in the region.

Agro-ecologically, it is classified into Kolla about 75 percent (lowlands below 1500 m.a.s.l.), WoinaDega about 24 percent (midland between 1,500-2,500 m.a.s.l), and Dega about 1 percent (highland above 2,500 m.a.s.l.). The region is characterized by a mono modal rainfall. According to the classification of rainfall regimes given by the National Meteorological Service Agency, Benishangul-Gumuz region is characterized by a wet season from April to October. Annual rainfall varies from 800 to 2000 mm. The temperature reaches a daily maximum of 200C to 250C in the rainy season and rises to 350C to 400C in the dry season. The minimum daily temperatures range from 120C to 200C, depending on season and altitude. The hottest period is from February to April.

Concept of Traditional Communication

The word communication denotes a source and extension of imagination in forms that can be learned and shared. It is the production, perception and understanding of messages about what is happening or what is about to happen or has already happened. On the other hand, the word traditional refers to a system that is old, naive, archaic, indigenous, and unmodified

(Ushe, 2007). Traditional communication as defined by Nwosu (1990) is "The process of disseminating information, ideas, and attitudes by certain specialized institutions set up for that purpose. It focuses on the exchange of information or messages that have traditional undertones."

By traditional modes of communication, we mean the ways Africans communicated among themselves, their societal modus operandi, the benefits of their cultural communication and how the process evolved to the present age from years back. Dede (1997, p.5) states that "Africa's traditional modes of communication form the interplay or synthesis of the traditional customs or conflicts of a community, its harmony and discord, its cultural affinities and disparities as well as its culture-specific values and practices." These traditional modes basically include oral tradition, (a practice coined "oramedia" by Ugboajah), such as mythology, interpersonal relations or interactions, symbols, signs, oral literature, etc.

Every nation in Africa had and still has communication patterns to suit their terrains. Wilson (1997) believes that "traditional modes of communication are employed in predominantly traditional and rural societies." Although the modern media of mass communication appear to have replaced the traditional media, the fact remains that different parts of Africa still employ various aspects of the traditional media in their daily living (Ottah, 2016). Several definitions to describe the African traditional mode of communication have been offered. Ansu-kyeremeh (1998) in Akpabio (2003, p. 2) defines it as "any form of indigenous communication system which by virtue of its origin form and integrate into a specific culture, serves as a channel for message in a way that requires the utilization of the values, symbolism, institution and ethos of the host culture through its unique qualities and attributes."

Traditional communication was animportant activity which touches every sphere of human life, bringing people, cultures, communities and races closer for meaningful development and peaceful co-existence. It is also seen as the process of social interaction that helps people to understand themselves and live harmoniously as organized people of a given state, country, or nation. Nwosu (1990) further defines traditional communication as a "process that uses signs, symbols, and other means to bring about inter-exchange of thoughts, and meaning between and among individuals and groups for better understanding and relation." These various traditional media of communication is similar to one another in virtually every rural community. Cited in Gabriel A,(2016).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory

As with most theories now applied to Advertising, the Two-step flow of communication was first identified in a field somewhat removed from communications-sociology. In 1948, Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet published The People's Choice, a paper analyzing the votersi decision-making processes during a 1940 presidential election campaign. The study revealed evidence suggesting that the flow of mass communication is less direct than previously supposed. Although the ability of mass media to reach a large audience, and in this case persuade individuals in one direction or another, had been a topic of much research since the 1920's, it was not until the People's Choice was published that society really began to understand the dynamics of the media-audience relationship.

The study suggested that communication from the mass media first reaches "opinion leaders" who filter the information they gather to their associates, with whom they are influential. Previous theories assumed that media directly reached the target of the information. For the theorists, the opinion leader theory proved an interesting discovery

considering the relationship between media and its target was not the focus of the research, but instead a small aspect of the study. Lazarsfeldet al suggested that "ideas often flow from radio and print to the opinion leaders and from them to the less active sections of the population."

People tend to be much more affected in their decision making process by face to face encounters with influential peers than by the mass media (Lazarsfeld, Menzel, 1963). As Weiss described in his 1969 chapter on functional theory, "Media content can be a determining influence…. What is rejected is any conception that construes media experiences as alone sufficient for a wide variety of effects." The other piece in the communication process is the opinion leader with which the media information is discussed.

The studies by Lazarsfeld and his associates sparked interest in the exact qualities and characteristics that define the opinion leader. Is an opinion leader influential in all cases, on all topics? Or is the influence of an opinion leader constrained to certain topics? How does an opinion leader come to be influential?

THE OPINION LEADERS

Who Are They? How Have They Come to be Defined?

A study by Robert Merton revealed that opinion leadership is not a general characteristic of a person, but rather limited to specific issues. Individuals who act as opinion leaders on one issue may not be considered influentials in regard to other issues (Merton, 1949). A later study directed by Lazarsfeld and Katz further investigated the characteristics of opinion leaders. Again, influential individuals seem constrained in their opinion leading to particular topics, no overlapping among the individuals. The opinion leaders seem evenly distributed among the social, economical, and educational levels within their community, but very similar in these areas to those with whom they had influence.

Katz and Lazars Feld did not identify any particular traits amongst opinion leaders that stand out. The traits that characterize each of the opinion leaders in their niche did have things in common though. For one thing, the opinion leaders were identified as having the strongest interest in their particular niche. They hold positions within their community affording them special competence in their particular niches. They are generally gregarious, sociable individuals.

Finally, they had/have contact with relevant information supplied from outside their immediate circle. Interestingly enough, Katz and Lazarsfeld observed that the opinion leaders receive a disproportionate amount of their external information from media appropriate to their niche. Studies by Glock and Nicosia determined that opinion leaders act "as a source of social pressure toward a particular choice and as a source of social support to reinforce that choice once it has been made (1966)." Charles Glock explained that opinion leaders often develop leadership positions in their social circles. They achieve these positions based on their knowledge of situations outside their circles (1952).

Praises and Support

Although the empirical methods behind the two-step flow of communication were not perfect, the theory did provide a very believable explanation for information flow. The opinion leaders do not replace media, but rather guide discussions of media Brosius explains the benefits of the opinion leader theory well in his 1996 study of agenda setting, "The opinion leaders should not be regarded as replacing the role of interpersonal networks but, in fact, as reemphasizing the role of the group and interpersonal contacts." Lazar self and his associates detailed five characteristics of personal contact that give their theory more validity:

- Non-purposiveness/casualness one must have a reason for tuning into a political speech on television, but political conversations can just "pop-up". In this situation, the people are less likely to have their defenses up in preparation; they are more likely open to the conversation.

- Flexibility to counter resistance ina conversation, there is always opportunity to counter any resistance. This is not so in media, a one sided form of communication.

- Trust Personal contact carries more trust than media. As people interact, they are better able through observation of body language and vocal cues to judge the honesty of the person in the discussion. Newspaper and radio do not offer these cues.

- Persuasion without conviction the formal media is forced to persuade or change opinions. In personal communication, sometimes friendly insistence can cause action without affecting any comprehension of the issues. Menzel introduced another strong point in favor of the two-step flow of information theory. First, there are an abundance of information channels "choked" with all types of journals, conferences, and commercial messages. These are distracting and confusing to their target. With the barrage of information humans are flooded with daily, it is not hard to understand why someone might turn to a peer for help evaluating all of it.

- Recent Studies Based on the Two-step Flow of Communication theory

The true test of a theory lies in its timelessness, its ability to spark interest and provoke thought years after its introduction. The two step flow of communication theory has been able to remain relevant throughout the years. This should not be difficult to believe considering it has fueled at least the past few pages this year, forty years after its debut. There have been several recent studies that have addressed issues arising from Lazarsfeld's, Katz's, and Merton's studies from the 1940s. In two such studies Gabriel Weimann (1994) and Hans-Bernd Brosius (1996) addressed the setting of agendas as a two-step flow of communication.

In Weimann's paper addressing the re-emergence of the opinion leader theory into modern day(1991), he addresses several problems that have been overcome sparking the new interest in the old theory. Many researchers have attempted to design credible models for testing the theory, but with only minor success (Weimann, 1991).

Brosius and Weimann set out to explain agenda setting using the basis of the two-step flow of communication theory determined by Lazarsfeld, Katz, and the many other researchers. To avoidthe difficulties in studying the actual flow of communication,Weimann and Brosius separated the opinion leaders from their two-step flow of communication theory. Participants were studied against a scale to determine the "Strength of Personality". The Brosius-Weimann study attempts to describe the individuals whose personal communication has impact on agenda setting. These individuals are the archetypal opinion leaders, who still control the flow of information. Weimann and Brosius define agenda setting as a two-step flow, wherein certain individuals (influentials) "collect, diffuse, filter, and promote the flow of information" from media to the community.

The difference between these influentials and the opinion leaders, as Weimann stresses, is that these influentials are usually elitists, not spread throughout the community as the old theory suggested (Weimann, 1991). Are these influentials a new breed? Or is there really a difference between influentials and opinion leaders? This, as yet, has not been addressed. Weimann and Brosius suggest the influentials are a subsection of the opinion leaders.

Innovation Diffusion Theories

The conceptual basis for this study derives from the innovation diffusion theories linked to development and communication. Whilst van den Ban and Hawkins (1988) see in innovations an idea, method, or object which is regarded as new by an individual, though not always the result of recent research; Rogers (1983) defines diffusion as a process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. It is a kind of social change. He distinguishes between 'diffusion' and 'dissemination'. The former is viewed as the spontaneous and unplanned spread of new ideas with emphasis on novelty. The latter is directed and managed.

The different stages of behavioral change experienced by a recipient from the time an innovation is introduced to him/her up to the time of his/her adoption of the novelty (awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and decision as with farmers), underlies the diffusion of innovation concept. Interest in the diffusion of innovations arises from the difficulty in getting new ideas adopted in spite of their obvious advantages.

Despite the numerous research works on diffusion of innovation by Rogers (1983) and others after him, there continues to be a wide gap between what is known and what is actually put to use. This is partly so because, for a very long time, diffusion of innovation found expression mostly in extension services. These focused and continue to focus attention on aspects of the utilization of scientific knowledge whilst ignoring the way this knowledge is produced and how it is integrated into ways in which communities see their own problems. Extension workers assume implicitly, and sometimes incorrectly, that innovation is always desirable. Little or no attention is paid to how the message content is selected and treated, by the source, decoded by the receiver(s) and incorporated in his/her (their) knowledge, attitudes and behavior. Few research projects examine the advantages and disadvantages of innovations from the point of view of the potential user.

Also, studies of adoption sometimes wrongly assume the availability of sufficient research information for extension agents to give good advice on the application of innovations. This is critical for developing innovations intended to solve community problems.

In addition, few systematic follow-up investigations, if any, are often made on reactions to efforts by extension agents to promote adoption and diffusion by communities. I go with the view that little or no attention is paid to major changes in social structure or an individual's way of life. Concern has been on 'peripheral' innovations than with those 'central' to a social system. Diffusion research emphasizes individual and/or group changes. Institutional and societal changes have seldom been investigated. Furthermore, Extension Agents are in the habit of adopting the 'top-bottom' or 'dripping down' approach to communication as opposed to the bottom-up participatory approach that is designed to take cognizance of the community's cultural context. Extension Officers, as they engage in investigating societal problems, are prone to individual biases and subjectivities that confront Researchers in general. Long (1989) and Millar (1992) stress these individual biases in their concepts of 'windows' and/or 'windows with shutters'. Villarreal (1990), therefore, suggests the creation of boundaries by the people themselves in their own language and from their own perspectives.

The adoption rate of an innovation has to do with its compatibility with the values and norms, beliefs, and past experiences of the social system. Snowden (1984) posits that the lack of a people centered approach is partly responsible for the failure of interventionist activities.

Important of Indigenous Communication

Paul Mundy and Megan Lloyd-Laney (2008) also depicted the important of indigenous communication as follows:

Indigenous communication has value in its own right. It is an aspect of culture which should be respected by outsiders. It isthe means by which cultures and the indigenous knowledge embedded in them are preserved, handed down, and shared. Here are two examples.

The women of the Sudan have not only innovated, tried, and tested hundreds of ways of fermenting foods to ensure their families' survival; they have also shared their knowledge with other women throughout the region, over hundreds of years. In this way they have passed on accrued wisdom for others to build upon and adapt, as their circumstances change.

Among the AguarunaJivaro in Peru, men are hunters, and women are gardeners. More than 100 varieties of manioc are in cultivation, and they provide more than half of the calories in the people's diet. The women not only hold the information about the methods of preserving such biodiversity, but they also hand it down through the generations. The older women take pride in their knowledge and in their ownership of different varieties, and distribute rare varieties to younger women.

But indigenous communication is being replaced by external systems - schools, mass media, extension services, and bureaucracies - and the survival of much valuable information and of the culture itself is in danger.

Indigenous channels are important conduits of change. 'Traditional' does not mean 'static'. Time and time again, research has shown that most farmers, men and women, do not learn about new technologies through the media or the extension services, but rather from their friends and neighbors or through their own experiments.

Indigenous channels enjoy high credibility because they are familiar and controlled locally. Local audiences are often sceptical of externally controlled mass media, viewing them merely as government propaganda.

External channels have a limited range. Television and newspapers are confined largely to the richer, urban households of the developing world. Schools reach only the young. Even the most common external channels, radio and extension services, fail to contact many people. Indigenous channels, by contrast, have a much wider audience, reaching those who do not read 'or write. They are crucial for the exchange of information with those people who are out of the reach of external channels.

Development programmes can use indigenous channels, both to collect and to disseminate information. 'Keeping an ear to the ground' by consciously tapping indigenous channels can help project officials discover the local situation and get reactions to project initiatives, and projects can make explicit use of these channels, Much progress has been made in this area, especially with folk media such as songs a puppet shows, but still there remains great potential for work and co-operation with indigenous organizations.

Indigenous channels offer opportunities for local participation in development efforts. Indigenous channels allow local people to communicate among themselves and with development professionals, using forms they are familiar with. Control is key here: professionals are often reluctant to give up control over the communication process in development projects. They are the ones who chair the meetings, determine the media broadcasts, and write the newsletters. There are

examples of mass-media technology being successfully controlled by project beneficiaries - participatory radio and interactive video for example - but such examples are rare. Consciously using indigenous forms enables local people to retain control of decision-making processes more easily.

Ignoring indigenous communication could lead to inappropriate development efforts. Irrigation planners in Bali ignored the role that a network of priests and 'water temples' had in the control of irrigation. This led them to introduce cropping methods and to construct dams and canals that were not appropriate to local conditions.

Everyone has the right to be the architect of his or her own future. If knowledge and ideas are the building blocks of a sustainable lifestyle, then each community needs to be at the centre of and in control of the networks that disseminate its information for the benefit of others; not just at the receiving end of information which is often packaged in inappropriate ways (e.g. in a book, which presupposes the ability to read). Giving greater credence to indigenous methods of communication is only the first step towards enabling people to gain control over their information and exchange it with others on an equal basis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researchers used the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research explores attitudes, behavior, and experiences through such methods as interview or focus group discussions and observations. At a basic level, qualitative research strives to understand the traditions, contexts, usages, and meanings of words, concepts, and ideas. It is so because qualitative studies focus on the social practices and meanings of people in a specific historical or cultural context (Taylor and Lindolf, 2002).

Research Design

The researcher was employing explorative research design and qualitative in its approach.

Instruments of Data Collection
Interview

Approximately 90 percent of all social science investigations rely on interviews (Briggs, 1986). As noted by Lindlof and Taylor (2011), this is so for several good reasons. Through interviews, the respondents can provide their opinion, motivation, and experiences.

Hence, the researcher used the interview to investigate deep rooted data that deals with the communicative potential and nature of Halwa traditional communication of the Berta community. Accordingly, in-depth interviews was used as major tools of data generation as far as this research is concerned. In-depth interviews are open-ended interviews, often conducted in person. Although the researcher may have a line of questioning, the researcher may move beyond it to probe deeper into the subject's comments. In-depth interviews last from 45 minutes to several hours Broom & Dozier (1990). In-depth interviews also enable interviewers to clarify questions if necessary and present visual material (Miller &Salkind, 2002).

Due to the shortage of time availability, and for the simplification of data collection and management, the researcher interviewed with a minimum of eleven (11) participants. Hence, the ultimate number of interviews held was determined by the saturation of data.

Probability sampling occurs when every individual or message in a particular population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample, regardless of any particular biases held by the researcher. The key to probability sampling is found in the random selection of potential messages or participants Don W. Stacks (2011).

To determine the participants for in-depth interview from the senior officials of the Berta community, the researcher used a random (probability) sampling assuming the participants have relatively equal knowledge about the indigenous communication of the Berta community.

Focus Group Discussions

In a phenomenon known as the "group effect" Carey (1994) and the "therapeutic effect" (Lederman, 1990), focus-group discussion participants show less inhibition, especially when they interact with similar others. Their talk exemplifies "a kind of 'chaining' or 'cascading' effect in which each person's turn of conversation links to, or tumbles out of, the topics and expressions that came before it" (Lindlof& Taylor, 2011). Focus Group Discussions held with rural people through the language of Amharic and Berta with the community respondents with the help of bilingual translators, this is believed to give respondents a better chance to freely express their views and thoughts. Moreover, the Focus Group Discussions were conducted in natural working places and habitats of the native people to enable respondents and participants speak out their hearts confidently and freely. Krueger (1994) cited in Anthony J.(2009;3) has suggested that three to six different focus groups are adequate to reach data saturation and/or theoretical saturation, with each group meeting once or multiple times. Hence, the researchers conducted Focus Group Discussions with a total number of 47participants (30 with Kebeles native people and seven public relations practitioners).

Sampling Techniques and Procedures

From 74 kebeles of AssosaWereda, 36 kebeles are where the native Berta community is inhabited. Thus, to take the sample from total kebeles, the researcher used three (3) Focus Group Discussions for the rural community by lottery sample taking technique for kebele selection, and one (1) for key informants (public relations practitioners). This is due to time and finance limitations. The number of Focus Group Discussions was determined by the data saturation mechanism.

Respondents in Focus Group Discussions from sampled kebeles were selected by the purposive selection method. This is because respondents are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data. In effect, they were selected with a specific purpose in mind, and that purpose reflects the particular qualities of the people or events chosen and their relevance to the topic of the investigation. From the researcher's point of view, the question to ask is this: who or what is likely to provide the best information? As Patton (l980) puts it, purposive sampling is a way of getting 'information rich' material from the groups.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

This chapter presents the major findings of the thesis. Four overarching themes have been identified based on the research questions for focus group discussion and in-depth interviews. The first theme deals with the nature of Halwa communication system. The second theme deals with the communicative potential of Halwa as public relations roles in line with cultural and social constructs pertinent to it in the Berta community. The third theme stresses how public relations practitioners use Halwa for their functions and practice. The fourth theme deals with its challenges and applicability in status quo of the community's experience.

Role of Hallway and its Attributes

Through the voice of the Berta People, Halwais traditional guest house. Even if the name Halwa represents the guest house in Berta community, it is everything for them. It is also the place where people come together or the center of mass for the discussion of their social, cultural, economic, and political issues of life. In Berta community, males who married and aged above fifteen years never eat being alone or being with their wives. The males come together and eat/drink. They share what they have to eat or to drink. At morning for breakfast, midday for lunch, and evening for dinner, they gather under Halwa.

The respondents also said that anybody who visits the Berta community will not be a burden for the individual and he/she never worries what to eat, to drink, and where to sleep. This is because of the availability of Halwaand the Berta community's warmest hospitality and deep rooted cooperation.

Respondents during in-depth interviews replied that; based on distance and their settlement or family relations, Halwacan be built. However, building Halwais mandatory. Even if the number of Halwain kebele is determined by the population number, at least, it can bear five to ten and maximum twenty to thirty members.

Hence, Halwa is where Berta community's come at a pivotal place and raise different issues. During both in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussions, they strictly underlined the basic functions of '**Hallway'** as follow;

Place of mass community's meet

According to the participants of Focused Group Discussions conducted, due to the community's culture, every resident and members of Halwamust come to the center at least in the morning and evening breakfast and dinner ceremony the respondents replied. A person, who rages against the rules and regulations of the Halwa, will be penalized. Similarly, couples who witnessed by the community members while eating and drinking with their wives, considered as hermits or out cast from the community. As a result, the people like and trust the system and come together to respect the culture, their leaders, and to get the benefits from being the members of the place.

Hence, according to the voice of the respondents, gathering and eating in common provide strength and enhances their relations. Even though it is not a regularly held meeting at once for all Halwas in a single meeting, when relatives from distance or guests come to the area, the whole Halwa members of the area come together and share ideas, introduce each other.

Center of Attendance and Regulation

Here, as explained above, sharing resources eating food in common and meeting together is compulsory according to the respondents. Of course, this system is not mainly for a form, rather it has an agenda of survival for the community without any discrimination between wealthy and poor.

Thus, the attendance takes help the community to create integration, socialization, harmonization in their life. All Halwa members can voice their wholeness. Carefully and thoroughly look for what can erode their culture, unity, safety, and security and then suggests remedy or protection via communication. To realize and take the role of socialization, it is the mandate of Halwa leaders and then cascades the responsibilities and duties of every member. Therefore, it has the value of public relation's ultimate goal. These expressions may fit with the role of public

relations in scanning and exploring their environments (assessing strength, weakness, threats, and opportunities) before planning and action.

Center of Cooperation Occurs

In the same words, the respondents discussed that, in Berta community every political, social, and economic activity is done in common. For instance, during the wedding ceremony, whether they are wealth enough or poor, in the system of Halwa institutions, the whole Halwamembers communicate and share every activity, costs, and task. The Halwa leaders play a great role in guiding and passing decisions. Here, if the expenses would be covered by the first Halwa, the leaders may decide on them. However, if the cost is over its capacity, they send their support requests to the next Halwa and soon and visa-vis. No kind of refusal for their request among the leaders or members. When they decide on the amount of personal contribution, they take in to account every individual paying potential.

In the same way, they apply their cooperation system for accidents, sorrow, plagues of diseases, and natural related cases, bankrupts. Even if similar problems happened in far distances or neighbors, every Halwa leaders again come together and discuss on the issue how to help, when to help, and then recruit who take the collected materials to letters representing the mass people. Hence, the issue of who seeks help, who needs comfort, who cannot construct houses, or who cannot build living homes (for widowed elders) is taken as an agenda and pass decisions, and assign groups. Thus that, joy fully members take the decisions passed by the Halwa leaders and implement it, Halwa is also a mechanism in which the Berta community insures their food security. According to the native people's discussion conducted, no food preferences to eat or to drink categorizing as food quality. This is aimed to avoid any discrimination and stigma among the community- wealthy to poor, and to help the needy groups fairly.

As a result, the community believes in communication and its cultural values to bind them together. For each event, they use the skill full communication before decision and enforcing. The communication (dialogue) system is balanced face to face, and finally creates mutual understanding. Thus, it is possible to deduce that, even if the system is traditional, the role of Halwa as a public relation is crucial to create mutual understanding.

Source of Information

Dominantly, the Berta community engaged in agriculture and trade as the respondents explained. To make diplomatic and to create a strong relationship with neighbors, the Berta community effectively uses communication. The respondents said that, "the Berta community and information is metaphorically, 'the same coin of the two faces'. In a similar expression, in ancient times, due to the lack of well-organized way of communication, and lack of information in fra structures, the Berta community exchanged information largely through the Halwa. This may help the community as an internal and external affairs relations.

Thus, from the voice of the respondents for both interview and Focus Group Discussions, there was a close relationship with Egypt, Sudan, and internally with Oromo people to trade each other and information exchange. For their social security, to know the market status, political status quo, the Berta community also follows radio programs transmitting from Sudan or other areas disseminating in Arabic language.

The Berta people share information every morning, midday, and evening. They communicate under the guidance of Halwa leaders. For instance, something happened in the night happenings will report to Halwa in the morning period of

their meeting. Similarly, the day occurrences of events will also report in the evening portion of their meeting. This cyclically continues thrice a day. Here, those who have radio sets and follow the national or world news, it is their habit to present what they heard from the group in their meeting, and they discuss on the presented issues, analyze it in relation to their own situation.

According to the discussion held with the native people, any information not reaching the Halwa or the leaders, it is considered as gossip and has no value. They stressed that, to be accepted, any information should be attributed, cross-checked, and the people should be informed.

In general, no information escapes from Berta community. They are active in assessing their environment and sensing information that may impact on their life. Since the community believes in credible information, the Halwa is the place where genuine information is produced or information is monitored and reaches to the members. Thus, at every meeting, it is similar to tuning in to radio or any media channels for Berta community.

How do Public Relations Practitioners Use Halwa in their Practice?

During the discussion held with public relations practitioners of the regional health bureau, they responded in such a way that the public relations practitioners do not have much awareness about the Halwa structure and its communicative potential. Surprisingly, some of the public relations officers do not know what Halwa is all about and its purpose. However, what they know is that, as Halwa built for guest reception purposes. Instead, they argued that for care, vaccination or to convey health-related messages, they use religious leaders opinion leaders kebele meeting.

In similar way, even though the reachability of the regional radio and television program to the rural residents is not convincing, they develop messages in the community's language and announce theme messages the respondents said. Besides, they prepare posters, spots, audio or video narrating in the community language and post or disseminate to the kebele leaders.

The other tool of the regional public relations practitioners used for information exchange were the rural primary health extension experts. Even during the supervision held, the experts largely depend on the primary health extension experts, kebele leaders, and governmental laid structures of the kebele administrative bodies.

Thus, during the focus group discussions, the public relations practitioners of the Bureau replied that the bureau largely employs modern media lets such as print media- posters, radio, and television.

Therefore, unless the public relations make communication to the deepest of the community in the traditional approach, it most probably difficult to probe, convince, and realize organizational objectives. In a similar explanation, since the community believe in mutual understanding and avoid one directional communication, traditional communication should be advanced side by side with the modern communication tools for public relations practices.

Halwa'sapplicability in Today's Status Quo and Its Challenges

During interview held, the informants said that; who ever go to the countryside of the native habitants dwell, he/she directly goes to the Halwa traditional center of people's gathering. This is because people love these kinds of their culture or natural setting to communicate heart-to heart. At Halwa, all community members come there without any external

pressure and it can simplify the load to persuade them, because already the people's mind and heart is won the influence of Halwa or the attitude perceived by the people the respondents added.

The respondents realized that Halwa is the blood vessels of Berta that every Berta generation passes through even if the quality and the setting of its originality are eroded from time to time. Especially in the rural areas people are using Halwa. However, there is a decrement of Halwa traditional communication in quality and quantity due to different factors. To mention the basic factors; modernization and expansion of education, drug trafficking, the outbreak and availability of modern media lets/ social media platforms/ lack of awareness by the community or some young groups considering the traditional value of the community as out dated and a sign of backwardness, lack of government attentions and partners, change in work habits.

The respondents argued that, without filtering the positive and negative effects of the western ideology and modernization bearing the power of invading one's identity, culture, values and its power corrupting attitudes, the new immerging generation is accepting it and ignored their selves' identity. Due to this reason, even people are suspected to each other in relation to information flow and become indifference about the culture, particularly the Halwa system.

As a result of these mentioned above, the corner stone of the Berta community's value, the identity which is Halwa entity is diminished from time to time in its existence, conveying reliable information, providing justice, safety and security, equipping the generation with discipline the respondents underlined.

Hence, as indicated in the review of literature, Paul Mundy and Megan Lloyd-Laney (2008) depicted the important of indigenous communication as follows:

Indigenous communication has value in its own right. It is an aspect of culture which should be respected by outsiders. It is the means by which cultures and the indigenous knowledge embedded in them are preserved, handed down, and shared.

This is the reason the respondents urged and explained as the generations are going out of the indigenous communication system and the outsiders are invading their own culture. I.e., the lack of filtering out siders culture effect and ignoring the powerful in its effective communication of their own culture.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study has tried to explore the nature and communicative potential of Halwa traditional media of Berta community. To this end, in Berta community through the Halwa, they communicate the whole aspects of their economic, social, political, cultural, safety, and peace; security, discipline, environmental protection, and etc…deal with it. From this point of view for the Berta community, Halwa is their identity life. The findings of the research showed that Halwa is the most valued cultural heritage of Berta people, even if its nature varies (gender-based) between females and males or between matured youths and below 15 years. Accordingly, women and children under 15 are found to have the least involved in Halwa, although information may reach them through informal occasions or send agendas to be discussed with females differently.

Halwa serves the community both as a face-to-face communication channel and as a traditionally valued center, cooperation held, common dine, conflicts reconcile, and it is believed to be a significant tool for information exchange and

communication in the Assosa zone- Berta people in the region where a rural inhabitants who have less access to modernized media. The fact that information gathering and sharing, implementing through Halwa is considered a social responsibility and unless and otherwise information without the involvement of Halwa is considered as gossip and has no value. Besides, all members of halwa must participate in every performance of the tasks taking place in Halwa. Moreover, Halwa is a major means of communication for rural people, so that it can be a foundation for dialogue, discussion, debate, or question, and Halwa can be adapted to political, economic, social, cultural, security, development communication promotion and mobilization, which could demand community participation.

Based on the major findings of the study, the researcher has drawn that Halwa traditional communication can have communicative potential as;

Information credibility and accuracy; in the Berta community, information dealt with in Halwa is credible and accurate. This is due to the nature of Halwa that enables all to participate, discuss, dialogue, and even their representatives cannot lie, disguise them. Besides, in nature, Halwa is face-to--to-face communication and the most valued traditional value for the Berta people.

In general, the study showed that this communication instrument is decreasing in quality and quantity due to different factors. In a similar way, even if the Halwa has high communicative potential, the public relations practitioners are not using- the government and stake holders also ignored turning their faces to the modern communication lets. On the opposite of these concepts, a large number of rural people are not using the modern media.

To this end, it seems a reasonable and appropriate mechanism for information exchange and its implications can be applied for public relations practice in communicating health and related issues.

Recommendations

As the study signifies so far, indigenous communication systems seem an 'eye' in the community's social, cultural, and economic affairs; therefore, due attention needs to be given by the government bodies, stake holders, academic institutions and communities at large. Considering the indigenous media limitations, the community should use them in its day today activities.

Messages and programs, health and related issues, and projects targeted at the rural populace should be well designed in line with the wishes and aspirations of the rural populace through well-organized and tough information exchange system- Halwa.

There has to be a policy that re strengthens the traditional communication as a community's assets, value, identity, and mechanisms for solving social, economic, and political problems via traditional communication.

There should be proper funding of traditional media of communication, to bring attitudinal changes for youngsters and create awareness for government bodies on its essentiality in line with the government programs. As a result, this will help to preserve both; values, norms, heritage, and alternative information sources. Hence, it helps the community with advanced information and stands for integration, mobilization, informed citizens, etc.

There should be emphasis on traditional communication side by side with the modern communication in the areas of rural dwellers. The finding also showed that as the community is inclined to the traditional communication due to its

credibility, accuracy, direct feedback, and availability of discussions, dialogue, or direct benefits they can consume from the communication, and the traditional communication creates a better forum for clarification over certain issues, and this helps to guarantee better understanding and appreciation. At best, an integration of traditional and modern for the implication of public relations communication is strongly recommended.

By and large, this study has made an effort to show the role of indigenous communication mechanisms in information exchange and implications for public relations practices. Nevertheless, further studies can be made by those who are enthusiastic in this area of study.

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