Effective Environmental Communication: A Case Study of Environmental Non-Government Organization (ENGO) in Malaysia

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Abstract: Mass media is a medium often used for information dissemination to the public. It is also seen as a tool in shaping public perception towards issues or organization. Therefore, this study looks at how mass media being used by six environmental non-government organizations (ENGO) in Malaysia in cultivating public awareness towards preserving and conserving the environment through their environmental messages. The objective of this study is also to identify the effectiveness of two-way communication between ENGO and public through mass media. Subsequently to gauge the effectiveness of environmental messages delivered by ENGO using the framework of Dialogic Communication Theory. This study uses qualitative method of face-to-face in-depth interview for data collection. Various media handler from each selected organization were interviewed. Findings indicate that, mass media assists ENGO in delivering environmental messages in various aspects, such as in projecting a formal outlook to the message delivered and in boosting the level of environmental awareness amongst the public through the message delivered by ENGO, therefore assisting each of the ENGO towards their communication outreach goal.

Keywords: *Mass Media, Environment, Public, Environmental Non-Government Organization (ENGO), Dialogic Communication Theory*

1. Introduction

According to Bruni et al., (2012), environmental issues are the most concern social problems, which include pollution, global climate change and depletion of natural resources, and it is threatening the communities and other living organisms on the planet. Since independence, Malaysia has enjoyed a very favourable socioeconomic development and has received international recognition, but unfortunately the development and the less responsible attitude of the people has brought some negative effects on the environment and the quality of human life (Jamilah, et. al, 2011). As stated in Zul and Zailan (2012), the public can be categorised as the major contributor to the environmental crisis apart from the natural disasters. The uncontrolled human activities serve as indirect contributors of various natural disasters such as flash floods, landslides and forest fires. In ensuring the environmental preservation, everyone in the community should play their role. Only some people should not shoulder awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship for future generations but it is the responsibility of all parties. According to Rusli and Abu Bakar (2005), in Malaysia, there are some ENGO that has taken a more active role in promoting and preserving the environment. . Some of the people will realise that ENGO such as the Malaysian Nature Society (MNS), Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM) and World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia (WWFM) has made great progress in research and also in terms of education and promoting sustainable living including natural resources. The environmental messages can be disseminated through various methods and one of it is through the mass media. According to Mohamad Yusof (2010), the mass media is a tool or instrument used to convey important information, build perception and the attitude of the public towards the information that had presented. The common mass media that are being used are print media and electronic media such as newspapers, magazines, books, television, radio, computer, telephone and information technology and other telecommunications. By looking at environmental issues that are looming in Malaysia, it is no doubt that the mass media are important in providing information to the public. With the abilities of the mass media in shaping the attitudes and behavior of the public, the researchers want to see how the mass media can help ENGO in delivering environmental messages to the public.

The objectives of this research are:

- To investigate the role of mass media in helping ENGO to disseminate environmental messages.

- To identify the effectiveness of two-way communication between ENGO and public through mass media.
- To gauge the effectiveness of environmental messages delivered by ENGO through mass media.

2. Methodology

In this research, the researcher has adopted the qualitative method, the face-to-face in-depth interview in order to get the data from six ENGO's that had been identified. The six ENGO's that were registered under the Malaysian Environmental NGOs (MENGO) and has been using the mass media as a medium in delivering environmental messages to the public are selected. The lists of the six ENGO's are Water Watch Penang (WWP), Sahabat Alam Malaysia (SAM), Wetlands International Malaysia, Global Environment Centre (GEC), World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia (WWFM) and Environmental Management and Research Association of Malaysia (ENSEARCH). The respondents that represented the ENGO's where the individual who are responsible for media affairs in their respective organizations. All the data that are obtained from the respondents was analyzed using Dialogic Communication Theory.

3. Literature Review

Mass media are perceived as a medium, which plays an important role in disseminating information and providing knowledge to the public (Juliana and Nur 'Aainaa, 2012). Apart of that, mass media also play a vital role in the political, economic, social, and cultural. It is also seen as a medium that are responsible in providing information to the public about the options that can be associated with a better life for the public itself (Alhadath, 2003). According to Mariah et. al (2004), the media focus on developing countries is to promote environmental issues as an issue involving the well-being of all people in the present and future. On the other hand, according to a report in Utusan Malaysia (2012), mass media play a big role in increasing public awareness of the importance of environmental protection and natural resources while also promoting a transparent and systematic system of forest management. From a different perspective, Govindaraju et.al (2012) asserted that, mass media should play a proactive role in creating awareness and convince people to make the world greener and environmentally friendly. Norma (2008) further explains that the role of the mass media act as a two-way information link between the responsible party and the public and also responsible for providing accurate and truthful information through effective reporting. The role of mass media in the reporting of environmental issues has grown extensively since the Stockholm Conference of 1972. This conference has changed several environmental reporting that always stereotypes such as a report on the environmental disaster began to the report that emphasizes the importance of environmental preservation by public and refrain from acts that could threaten the quality of the environment (Mariah, et. al, 2004). Apart from delivering information to the public, the mass media also has the ability of bringing a message to a lot of public as well as be able to shaping and influence public opinion without them realising it. By involving the public with current issues, mass media can influence public wisely in making decisions and public policy discussions (Nag, 2011).

According to Rusnan (2012), traditional media were much superior and popular compared to new media proven through the sale of the Malay-language newspaper circulated in Peninsular Malaysia that show increase from 1.7 million to 2.1 million for the years 2005 to 2011. In addition, the improvements of the circulation of the Malay-language newspaper also illustrate that the public still feel that the remains traditional media are more favourable than the new media (internet). However, Siti Ezaleila and Azizah (2011) argued that in the present era, new media are seen to be more dominant compared to the traditional media or old media such as print media, electronic media, broadcast media and interpersonal media. New media are referring to the use of online social networking sites such as Facebook, Friendster and Twitter. By looking at the important roles of the mass media as mentioned earlier, the researchers wanted to see how the mass media could help the ENGO in delivering environmental messages to the public as an effort to cultivate public awareness towards preserving and conserving the environment. This research also aimed to look at how ENGO leverage using the mass media as a medium of delivering environmental messages to the public using Dialogic Communication Theory. According to Jans (1999), Dialogic Communication Theory was introduced by Martin Burber who is a world famous philosopher. Burber looks 'dialogue' is more than talk and it includes communication between two people, mutual respect between them and can hear the views of others. Dialogic Communication Theory has five principles that are related namely the dialogic loop, the usefulness of information, the generation of return visits, ease of the interface and the rule of conversation of visitors (Taylor et.al, 2001).

4. Results

To investigate the role of mass media in helping ENGO to disseminate environmental messages.

a) Its ability in sharing information: In this context, all of the ENGO's states that, the sharing of information only take place from one sided (WWP, GEC, SAM, ENSEARCH, WWFM, and Wetlands International Malaysia). In terms of giving and sharing of information, the ENGO stated that, they are the only one who is able to do that. That is because; the mass media that are used by them (newspapers and television) were much more favorable to them only in terms of providing and delivering environmental messages to the public. The ENGO considered that the public are not capable of using the mass media to share information with the ENGO.

b) Its ability in helping deliver information: There are different opinions given by the ENGO about the media's ability in delivery environmental messages to public. For example, according to SAM, the mass media are able to help projecting and show the message in a way that it looks more formal and serious. As for GEC, WWP and Wetlands International Malaysia, they asserted that mass media help ENGO in delivering environmental messages to many people especially newspapers. ENSEARCH and WWFM state that the mass media are able to help ENGO in providing a lot and detailed information to public and make communication between ENGO and public more closely and personal.

c) The facilities and creativity, which are highlighted: The ENGO stated that, the facilities and creativity that can be highlighted by ENGO in delivering environmental messages to the public through the mass media are dependent on the type of media that are being adopted. If the message is communicated through the newspapers, the convenience and creativity is limited (Wetlands International Malaysia, ENSEARCH, SAM, WWP, GEC and WWFM,). This is because the original key message given by the ENGO could be changed and written in various different styles according to the press. However, if the ENGO uses the print media such as magazines or books, the creativity and facilities can be highlighted and the message are tailoring according to the target audience (GEC) and they are able to provide all the complete and detailed information that needed by the public (WWFM, WWP and GEC).

d) The level of use: In terms of the use of mass media, majority of ENGO stated that, the usage is at the moderate level (Wetlands International Malaysia, ENSEARCH, SAM, WWP, GEC and WWFM). This is because they will use mass media according to the needs and activities that would be carrying out. Their organisations will try their best to use all media if it is appropriate to the activities and issues to be carried out by them.

To identify the effectiveness of two-way communication between ENGO and public through mass media.

a) Communication relationship between ENGO and public: The communication relationship between ENGO and public using the mass media are limited (GEC, WWP, SAM, ENSEARCH, WWFM and Wetlands International Malaysia). This is because, most of the mass media used by ENGO is only one-way communication pattern. However, this is not a problem for the ENGO because the ENGO is more concerned with the message and the information that they disseminate to the public served by them in the mass media. However, the ENGO state that, they will take care of communication relationship with the public by giving clear, complete and precise information about the issues if they would want to publish it in any mass media. They would also select and used mass media that only appropriate to the current community (Wetlands International Malaysia, ENSEARCH, SAM, WWP and WWFM and GEC).

b) Respond to public opinion: According to the ENGO, they did not receive any types of feedback or opinions from the public on the environmental issues presented by the mass media that they used (Wetlands International Malaysia, ENSEARCH, SAM, WWP, GEC and WWFM). The ENGO only receive phone calls from the public to requests for more information on the environmental issues that they have published earlier through the mass media. This is because, most of the time, the ENGO will use the newspaper as the medium in disseminating information to the public and thus, this limit the abilities of the public in responding to the ENGO.

c) Frequency of use: The frequency of mass media used by ENGO in delivering environmental messages to the public is illustrated in the table below:

Table 1: The frequency of mass media used by ENGO

ENGO	Frequency of use
GEC	Depending on the projects.
SAM	Depending on the issue released.
WWP	Depending on the activities carried out and the type of media used.
ENSEARCH	Depending on the needs required to use it.
WWF Malaysia	Depending on the project and organization activities.
Wetlands International Malaysia	Depending on the projects.

d) Communicating problems: All of the ENGO asserted that they have no problems in communicating with the public using through mass media (Wetlands International Malaysia, ENSEARCH, SAM, WWP, GEC and WWFM).

To gauge the effectiveness of environmental messages delivered by ENGO through mass media.

a) The content of the message: Based on the research findings, the content of the message are dependent on the focus of environmental issues that the expertise of the ENGO. For example, the issues of water conservation are often being concerned by WWP, and the preservation of the environment including animals is the concern of WWFM. On the other hand, the issues on development of environmental management are the concern of ENSEARCH and Wetlands International Malaysia are concern of the conservation and wise use of wetlands. As for the human rights involving the environment, SAM are the ENGO that are concern on and in terms of sustainable life, GEC are the ENGO that tackle the issues. The information that is related to the particular ENGO is often very accurate and detailed to ensure that the public understand the messages that are being conveyed.

b) Strategy for message delivery: There is a variety of message delivery strategies used by ENGO as an effort to ensure environmental messages delivered through mass media gives an impact to the public. The strategies include the consistency of the environmental messages through all the mediums that are adopted, select the potential mass media that gives cooperation only (GEC), choose the issues that public concern and interest (ENSEARCH and Wetlands International Malaysia) and provide complete, detailed and relevant facts (SAM and WWP).

c) Public feedback: The findings indicated that, the public feedback on the environmental message delivered by the ENGO is positive. Through the phone calls that the ENGO receive, the public often ask for more information regarding an issue that was presented in the mass media (Wetlands International Malaysia ENSEARCH, SAM, WWP, GEC and WWFM).

d) Effectiveness of message delivery: Based on the feedback given by the respondents, the effectiveness of environmental messages delivered through mass media is based on several factors which depend on the issues that have been selected by the organization (Wetlands International Malaysia), the identification of the target audience by the organization (ENSEARCH, WWP, GEC and SAM) and the media are selected by the organization (WWFM).

Discussion of the Research Findings

To investigate the role of mass media in helping ENGO to disseminate environmental messages:

The mass media has its own abilities in helping ENGO to deliver the environmental messages to the public. This can be illustrated through it ability that helps ENGO delivering environmental messages to a lot of people especially the newspapers, The newspaper is capable in illustrating the message to look more formal and serious, to help the ENGO to provide a lot and detailed information to public and make communication between ENGO and public more closely and personally. All of these capabilities can help ENGO to convey environmental messages to the public effectively as an effort to make public more conscious of the importance of the environment On the other hand, in term of the ability in sharing information in mass media, the ENGO has a capability to give and share the information with the public while the public would have some difficulties in sharing and giving information with the ENGO because of the public does not have ability to do that. This situation makes the sharing and giving of information occurs in one direction only. In ensuring the messages that are deliver in mass media would influence public, the ENGO include some creativity and highlight on the facilities that they are able to provide to

attract the public. They will provide all the complete and detailed information that needed by the public and tailor the message according to their target audience. These creativity and facilities are only used and being applied when ENGO use the print media such as magazines and books in delivering environmental messages to the public. However, if the ENGO utilize newspaper in delivering environmental messages to the public, the creativity and the highlight of the facility are limited because of the original message given by the ENGO will be changed and adapted by the press in their style. From the differentiation of the media, it is clear that the mass media has the abilities in disseminating the environmental messages effectively to the public. This is because; the use of mass media that appropriate and comprehensive can help the ENGO to extend and maximizes the environmental messages delivered to the public. The ENGO also should select the mass media according to the target audience and use the various mass media in delivering environmental messages to the public and not only focused to certain mass media only. In addition, the facilities provided and creativity is highlighted by ENGO in environmental messages conveyed in the mass media should be maintained while making improvements in the future to ensure environmental messages delivered will attract public interest to see and adapt the message in their lives.

To identify the effectiveness of two-way communication between ENGO and public through mass media: The communication relationship between the ENGO and the public are limited and it just one-way communication only. There are no occurrence of any form of two-way communication between the public and the ENGO. The most of the mass media used by the ENGO were newspaper and television, which is almost impossible for the public to communicate or provide feedback to the ENGO. Although the communication only occurs in one way, the ENGO does not take it as a negative issue, this is because they are more concern about the accuracy of the information that the public receive compared to the feedback. Due to the one-way communication relationship between the ENGO and the public, the ENGO does not receive any of the feedback or opinion from the public regarding the issues that are being published by them in the mass media. In tackling this issue, it is suggest that the ENGO should use the medium that allows the public to interact directly with them and not limiting the interaction by using the medium that in nature is one-way communication. The use of the medium that allows two-way communications should be a priority for ENGO in conveying the environmental messages to the public to ensure mutual communication between the ENGO and the public. This is because, two-way communication is very important in strengthening the relationship between the ENGO and the public. Additionally it also allows the public to give their views and information that can be used by ENGO to improve the environmental message in the future.

To gauge the effectiveness of environmental messages delivered by ENGO through mass media: The effectiveness of environmental messages delivered by the ENGO through mass media are based on several factors, which include the issues that have been selected by the organisation, the target audience has been identified by the organisation and the media that are selected by the organisation. All these factors have contributed to the effectiveness of environmental messages delivered by the ENGO through the mass media. In ensuring the effectiveness of environmental messages that are delivered through the mass media, the ENGO applied several strategies. The strategies are include choosing the issues that the public are concern and have interest in, provide complete, detailed and relevant facts, the consistency of all environmental messages through all mediums and select the potential mass media that gives cooperation only. The various strategies that are being adopted by the ENGO are competent and it should be continued in the future. However, the ENGO must also be willing to add a host of other interesting strategies in order to capture the interest and attention of the public to read and take the environmental message delivered by the ENGO effectively. Apart from that, the ENGO should utilise the use of mass media as much as can to ensure environmental messages can be deliver to the public in various effective way. The use of mass media in an appropriate method can help the ENGO to ensure that the environmental messages that are delivered to the public can benefit and influence the public knowledge and attitudes towards the environmental issues that are around them.

The Relationship between the Research and Dialogic Communication Theory: This research was structured based on the five principles of Dialogic Communication Theory founded by the world famous philosopher, Martin Buber. The five principles namely the dialogic loop, the usefulness of information, the generation of return visits, ease of the interface and the rule of conversation of visitors were applied in the interview questions to collect data from the respondents. From the theoretical perspective, these five principles focuses on the dialogue, that is a form of interpersonal communication as an effective tool for the benefit of both parties that mutually interact. The used of Dialogic Communication Theory in this

research was intended to know, understand and predict the relationship between the public and the ENGO through communication interaction that created to increase the public awareness of the importance of preserving and conserving the environment. Based on the first principles which is the dialogic loop, this principle was not applied by the ENGO. This is because; the process of sharing and giving information only involves one side, which is the ENGO. In this context, the public are just merely receiving information and there is no feedback or sharing of information. The second principle in this theory, which is the usefulness of information, was seen to be applied perfectly by the ENGO. This are clearly illustrated through the provision of useful information about environmental issues that became the focus of ENGO to show and inform to the public was presented in a complete, detailed and creative way. Other than that, the usefulness of information that served to the public by the ENGO were the issues that ENGO know very well and had expertise was delivered to the public in order to increase public knowledge and awareness of environmental issues that related with their lives.

Furthermore, the information that provided by the ENGO also can be used by the public to deal with the environmental issues that affect them directly. On the third principle of the theory, the ease of the interface. This principle was being applied very well by the ENGO. The principle is being applied when the ENGO provided certain facilities for environmental messages delivered to the public to facilitate the public to see and understand the message conveyed by the ENGO. In addition, the ENGO adapt various methods to increase the creativity of the environmental messages that delivered in mass media to attract the public to accept the message effectively. The ENGO has also applied the fourth principle, which is the generation of return visits. This can be seen when the ENGO use the mass media repeatedly based on the project and the activities that has been carried out by them. To ensure that the message are being conveyed to the media effectively, ENGO has adopted various method which include providing facilities and also other creative message in delivering the environmental message to the public. To ensure the public receive the environmental messages that are conveyed in the media that used by them in the future, the ENGO has done a variety of things including providing facilities and using some creativity to highlight the environmental message that is delivered to the public. The last principle, which is the rule of conversation of visitors, is being applied by the ENGO. In this case, various strategies have been taken by the ENGO in ensuring environmental messages that are being conveyed by them in the mass media will be accepted and understood by the public. In ensuring the positive impact of the message, the ENGO has used different method in capturing their attention and also interest.

5. Conclusion

The use of mass media by ENGO in delivering environmental messages to the public is at the moderate level. That's because, the ENGO has not fully utilise the potential of the mass media but just merely focuses on the certain media only in delivering environmental messages to the public. The mass media is believed to be useful in aiding the ENGO in delivering environmental messages to the public in a more effective and comprehensive way based on the advantages and benefits that have in the mass media. Besides that, for future research, it is suggested that, the researcher should includes a larger sample to obtain more accurate and complete data. For example, the researcher can involve all 23 NGO's that are registered under The Malaysian Environmental NGO's (MENGO) as a sample.

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