

Agricultural Development Communication for New Theory Concept of His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej : Communication Process for the Diffusion of New Theory Concept which Result into an Adoption by Farmers

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ABSTRACT

This study of “Agricultural Development Communication for the new Theory of King Bhumipol Adulyadej” aimed at studying communication factors affecting farmers’ adoption of the New Theory, including information exposure, information seeking, content analysis, perception and interpretation, and understanding of the New Theory, communication types, and networking. It also studied relevant factors affecting the adoption of the New Theory by farmers in order to analyze the relationship between communication processes and factors affecting adoption of the New Theory. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used with the target farmers under the New Theory projects at: 1) Huai Sai Royal Development Study Center, Phetburi Province; 2) Wat Yanasangvararamvoramahawihan Agricultural Occupation Training and Development Center, Chonburi Province, and 3) farmers participating in New Theory projects of the Phetburi and Chonburi Provincial Agricultural and Cooperative Offices.

The study found that the communication process affecting adoption of the New Theory had three main stages: Stage 1) Perception, persuasion, and adoption; Stage 2) Implementation and information seeking; and Stage 3) Confirmation. The media most influential in the stage of perception, persuasion, and adoption were television, to which most farmers had the greatest access, and people media, which were the agricultural extension officers at the sub-district level and staff members of the New Theory projects. These people media were also the most important source that farmers used as sources in their information seeking. Training was the important specific medium in enhancing the farmers’ learning. Communication networks had a more important role than other media in the stage of confirmation. Besides the communication process, there were also other factors which could either positively or negatively influence adoption of the New Theory; in order of importance, these were: organizational support factors, economic factors, individual factors, geographical and local product factors, and cultural and local wisdom factors.

Key words: New Theory Concept ,communication, adoption

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural Development Communication for the New Theory aimed at communicating an innovation, namely the New Theory of Agriculture, to various groups of farmers for their adoption and practice. The communication process used various kinds of media to transfer the New Theory in different stages. The media used were single media or multiple media such as the mass media, people media, and the specific media depending upon appropriateness to each area and also to the targeted group and the message distributed.

His Majesty the King demonstrated his genius in development communication, for he transmitted his ideas to his people all over the country through speeches delivered on various occasions through mass media, both television and radio.

The concepts enunciated by His Majesty in his speeches on the New Theory were incorporated by the government as national policy under the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997-2001), which emphasized greater effort in promoting the development of sustainable agriculture by identifying certain areas for various types of sustainable agricultural development, such as mixed farming, nature farming, organic agriculture, integrated crop – livestock farming agroforestry, and New Theory Agriculture (Pookpakdi, 1992), the areas making up not less than 20% of the nation's agricultural land, or about around 25 million *rai*. This presented an alternative for around eight million poor farmers which would enable them to earn adequate incomes by pursuing agricultural occupations and to live in the rural areas with security at a time when the nation was suffering economic crisis. The public and private sectors cooperated with farmers in order to make agriculture a viable alternative for Thai society under the philosophy of economic self-sufficiency.

The New Theory of Agriculture of His Majesty the King Bhumipol Adulyadej was one form

of sustainable agricultural development. It focused on water resource management to support agricultural production aiming first for food security and family consumption, and then for increasing security by generating income, and finally for other activities. The New Theory was composed of three main stages: Stage 1 aimed at securing adequate food and other things necessary for life; Stage 2 aimed at organizing farmers into groups; and Stage 3 aimed at securing financing from outside sources for agricultural development.

Previous studies found that several types of communication and media had been prepared by various agencies and used in the effort to propagate the New Theory. Generally, messages were designed to transmit New Theory principles, benefits, and practices. The foci and presentations varied, but overall the intent was to provide target farmers with knowledge and understanding of the New Theory.

However, the objectives of the agencies that prepared the messages were not all successfully attained because the targeted farmers differed in the ways they sought, perceived, interpreted, and understood the messages depending on the quantity and quality of messages that they received from various media. These communication processes affected the extent to which each individual farmer adopted the New Theory and put it into practice. Hence, this study had as its objectives below. The conceptual framework of the research is shown in Figure 1.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To study the factors of communication process relevant to the adoption of the New Theory and its practices such as:

- 1) Organizational support factors
- 2) Economic factors
- 3) Individual factors, such as attitudes, beliefs, and values
- 4) Geographical and local product factors
- 5) Cultural and local wisdom factors

2. To analyze relationships between communication processes and factors affecting adoption of the New Theory.

METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK OF RESEARCHES

The methodology of this particular research project composed of the selection of sample group. In this study the sample group used were as follows:

1) Farmers under the New Theory Project supported by the Special Committee for the Royal Project at Huai Sai Royal Development Study Center

in Phetburi Province.

1.1) A sample of 31 drawn from among the 108 farmers participating in the New Theory Project of the Phetburi Provincial Office of Agriculture and Co-operatives.

2) The 12 farmers participating in the program of the Wat Yanasangvararamvoramahawihan Agricultural Occupation Training and Development Center, Chonburi Province.

2.1) A sample of 12 drawn from among the 174 farmers participating in the New Theory Project of the Chonburi Provincial Office of Agriculture and Co-operatives.

The total number of sample farmers from

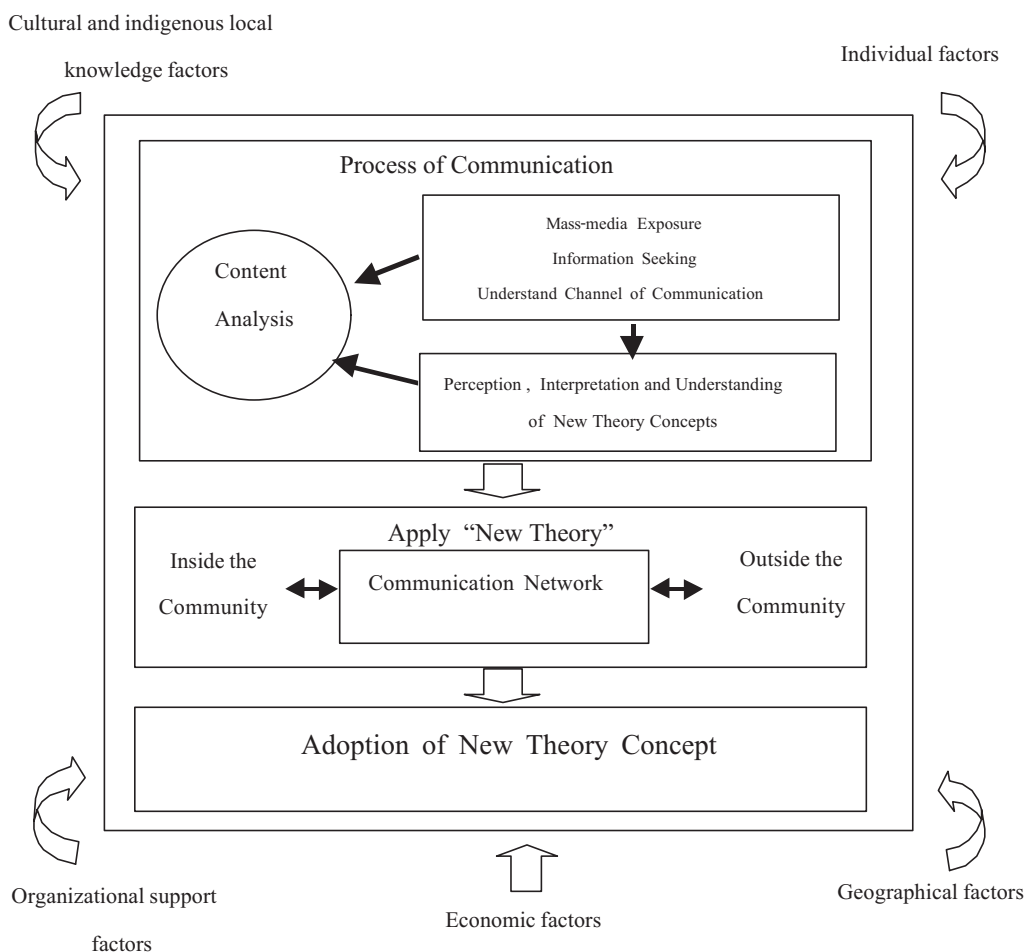


Figure 1 Research framework of the study on Agricultural Development Communication for New Theory Concept of His Majesty the King Bhunipol Adulyadej.

whom the quantitative data were collected was set at 86. Qualitative data were gathered primarily from 31 farmers of Group 1, i.e., the Huai Sai New Theory Project in Phetburi Province; data on certain points were gathered from Groups 2-4 for comparative study.

Research tools used for data gathering composed of a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and group processes, while the research framework of the study on development communication for agricultural development under the New Theory of His Majesty the King is shown in the diagram in Figure I.

According to the diagram in Figure I, the research framework of the study composed of three components such as :

- a) Processes of communication
- b) Acceptance of the New Theory
- c) Adoption of New Theory Concepts

Overall, the three main components of this research framework is affected by four important related factors, which are:

- a) Cultural and indigenous (local) knowledge factors
- b) Individual factors
- c) Geographic factors
- d) Organization factors
- e) Economic factors

In the process of communication, the following factors were involved:

- 1) Factors related to the communication network.
- 2) Factors related to cultural and local indigenous wisdom.
- 3) Individual factors.
- 4) Content analysis of any media under the New Theory which involved media exposure, information seeking and communication channel, perception, interpretation, and the understanding of the New Theory.

The acceptance of the new theory involved the type of community network and communication inside the community and communication with the outside.

Adoption of the New Theory Concept involved local wisdom, natural resources and products, and geographical conditions. The expected outcome was descriptive narrative information about how to adopt or apply the New Theory in practice.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1) The Adoption process of the New Theory

The study found that communication process for the New Theory was composed of three main stages: Stage 1 --Perception, persuasion, and adoption; Stage 2 --Implementation and information seeking; and Stage 3 --Confirmation. Different components were involved in each stage; a model showing the various factors involved in the adoption of the New Theory is presented in Figure 2.

The model in Figure 2 showed the components of the communication process affecting adoption of the New Theory by the farmers. This is shorter than the five stages of Rogers' theory (Rogers , 1995) (knowledge, persuasion, decision-making, implementation, and confirmation), while the components of communication process shown in figure 2 is made up of only three stages. The reason for this is that in the first stage, His Majesty the King played a very significant role in generating the New Theory Concept. Besides, due to his unique position in the nation, His Majesty is an opinion leader of extremely high credibility, thus making communication concerning adoption of the New Theory is very persuasive.

The New Theory adoption process was classified into three stages as follows:

Stage 1: Perception, Persuasion, and Adoption

This first stage was the stage in which farmers gained their perception of the New Theory from His Majesty the King's speeches via mass media such as television, newspapers, radio, and magazines, and also people media plus some external factors. All these mass media disseminated information

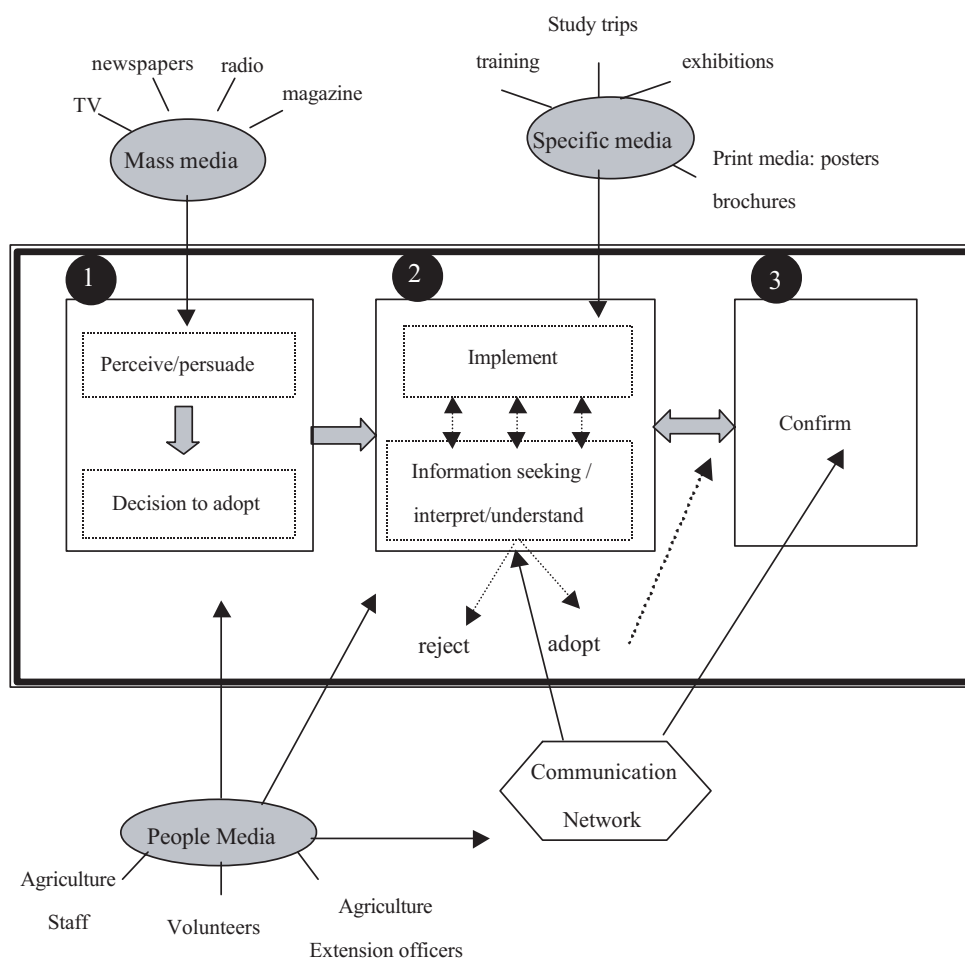


Figure 2 Communication process for adoption of the New Theory by farmers.

on the New Theory leading to fast perception by farmers all over the country. The extremely high credibility of the source, which was His Majesty the King, who acted as the sender, motivated farmers in adoption of the New Theory's principles. Contributing to adoption was supported from many levels of people media and from all concerned agencies such as the agricultural staffs at the tambon level, the agricultural staffs at the district level, graduate volunteers, the agricultural extension staffs of the Office of Agriculture and Co-operatives, the staffs from the Development Study Centers, who represented many concerned agencies to the targeted farmers. All these kinds of people media contributed to rapid acceptance by the targeted farmers because the

farmers could see concrete results of the application of the New Theory and because they had the opportunity to develop themselves by participating in the New Theory projects mounted by the various government agencies in their locality.

Stage 2 : Implementation and Information Seeking

After the targeted farmers had accepted the New Theory and joined a New Theory project, the practical application of the Theory began. During this stage of implementation, specific media had a greater role than mass media in assisting the targeted farmers implement the New Theory. In this stage, most farmers received training through lecture observation from field trips and demonstration fields.

Printed media, such as posters and brochures, were used to present New Theory principles and relevant issues to the targeted farmers. In some cases, farmers who encountered problems or obstacles had the initiative to seek information from various media, such as mass media and specific media, other than that provided by the agency responsible for their project. The farmers interpreted this information and this enabled them to gain a better understanding of the New Theory.

It was found that in this implementation stage, the farmers gathered into groups—either existent groups or new ones formed under their project. This led to the formation of New Theory communication networks. These stimulated accessing more kinds of media to seek information to increase capabilities and learn about the New Theory. It also built up participatory communication processes and acceptance of the New Theory within the group leading to greater social activity in such forms as group meetings, study trips, and exhibitions.

In this stage, some farmers were confronted with problems. This caused some of them to stop implementation, while some continued implementation.

Those who gave up stopped seeking information about the New Theory and abandoned implementation because they did not see any betterment of their lives, their living conditions, or their incomes. Some changed to other occupations.

Those who continued their implementation did so because they saw some improvement arising from their implementation such as better living conditions and income. As a result, they continued their implementation into Stage 3 of the New Theory.

Stage 3 : Confirmation

If farmers continued implementation, they continued their information seeking and used the power of their communication networks to develop their production capabilities to enter Stage 2 of the New Theory, group formation. In other words, the communication network had to function effectively and strengthen the community. Beyond this, they

entered Stage 3, in which farmers endeavored to solve the economic problems of their community through seeking support from agencies concerned. Understanding of the economy of self-sufficiency brought about good results. Ultimately, all farmers who continued implementation of the New Theory achieved the objective of sustainable agricultural development in accord with the principles of the economy of self-sufficiency laid down by His Majesty the King.

The above discussion has dealt with only communications factors related to the three stages. There are other important factors which influenced the three stages in the acceptance of the New Theory. These were as follows:

Relevant Factors Affecting the Adoption of the New Theory

Relevant factors affecting adoption of the New Theory are shown in Figure 3 as follows:

The important factors relevant to adoption of the New Theory among the target farmers, shown in Figure 3, composed of :

Individual Factors: All the target farmers accepted the New Theory in principle when they learned it was a project of His Majesty the King because they saw it would be beneficial to them. Implementation, however, depended upon the capability of each individual farmer in accepting attitudes, ideas, and practices at variance with his/her traditional form of agriculture as well as the knowledge and experience of each farmer. These individual differences affected the extent and the speed of adoption. Some farmers turned out to be early adopters and became opinion leaders for their groups through activities such as trial plots and demonstrations. This provided a model for the other members of the group, and when it was recognized that the results were good, the others followed.

Organizational support factors: These also had a very significant effect on adoption of the New Theory by farmers, for they need assistance from the agencies in order to begin implementation. The agencies provided support to help defray expenses

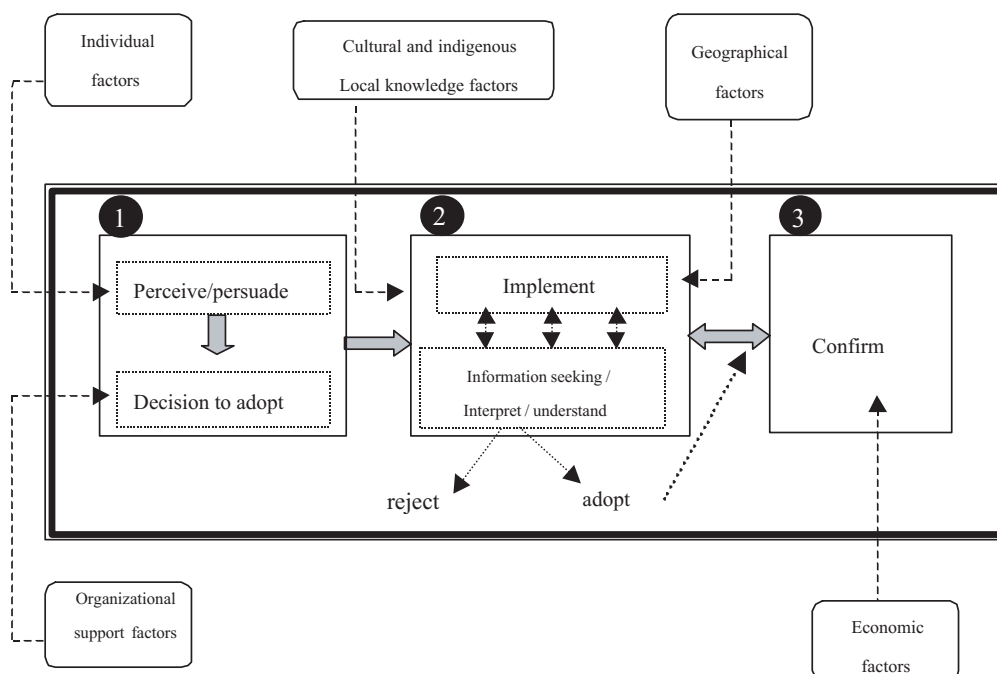


Figure 3 Relevant Factors Affecting Adoption of the New Theory by farmers.

by digging farm ponds for free and distributing free seed and animals. They also provided training in which they used people media, i.e., agricultural extension officers, staff members of the centers, and tambon and district agriculture officers, who worked with the farmers in the areas for which they were responsible in implementing the policies of their agencies. When the target farmers saw that state agencies were ready to assist them, they gained confidence and decided to proceed in implementation.

Cultural and Local Wisdom factors: These were significant in Stage 2, implementation, because the New Theory required that farmers used local wisdom and practices. The many and varied practices of traditional agriculture in each locality were applied at this stage. Agricultural development that was in accord with local wisdom proceeds more quickly and easily. At this stage, farmers adjusted the new knowledge they had acquired so as to integrate it with their traditional practice and local wisdom in order to enhance the effectiveness of their implementation.

Geographical factors: These were very important in the implementation of the New Theory. If farmers accepted the New Theory in Stage 1 but then attempted to implement it without adapting it to the geographical characteristics of their land, they encountered problems. For example, a farmer who dug a pond and found that it didn't hold water would be unable to continue implementation of the New Theory, or if the earth dug up to form the banks of the pond was infertile, the farmer suffered a reduction in the area of land that he could cultivate. If, however, farmers had already been practicing agriculture in a manner similar to the New Theory, when they adopted the New Theory, they were able to modify the geographical features of their land more easily. Thus, it was important that farmers must carefully assess the geographical features of their land before attempting to implement the New Theory.

Economic factors: Actually these were the fundamental factors from which originated the New Theory, which aimed at solving the economic crisis

of the country and especially of the small farmer. In the acceptance of the Theory by farmers, it was found that economic factors were important at the confirmation stage, in which a farmer decided whether or not to continue implementation of the New Theory. If a farmer perceived implementing the New Theory improved his/her economic situation and understood the economy of self-sufficiency, he/she would be confirmed in the New Theory and continue implementation. On the other hand, farmers who perceived implementation of the New Theory did not improve their economic situation ceased implementing the New Theory. This might have been because they had understood that economic self-sufficiency meant that they would become rich or would quickly be freed of their indebtedness or because they refused to lower their production or the role of merchants and middlemen or to increase their participation in their group to gain greater bargaining power in marketing.

CONCLUSION

Agricultural development communication for the New Theory of His Majesty the King is a communication process which has three stages: 1) perception, persuasion and adoption; 2) implementation; and 3) confirmation. Agriculture officers and the staffs of agricultural centers were the people media that had the greatest influence on farmers. The farmers under the New Theory projects were active communication receivers, for they did not merely receive messages but actively sought out information. At the same time, they joined in forming communication networks. Within these networks, the communication processes affected perception, interpretation, information seeking, enhancing capabilities and learning, participatory communication and communication for adopting an innovation. The strength of the communication network affected the effectiveness of communication for realizing the objectives of agricultural development under the New Theory. Besides these communication

factors, other factors also affected the adoption of New Theory, arranged in order of importance, these were: organizational support factors, economic factors, individual factors, geographical and local production factors, and cultural and local wisdom factors.

The results from this study show the relationship of all relevant factors with the communication process for the New Theory of His Majesty the King. The results can be applied to other studies concerned with other forms of development communication.

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