

## THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN COMMUNITY AWARENESS TOWARDS THE RIGHT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES (PWD)

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### ABSTRACT

*Discrimination or denial of the rights of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) to study and work should not apply to our society. It is said that they are very desirous, still have the force and are qualified in carrying out life like other typical ones. They are often discriminated against by normal people who have no shortcomings. Their existence is often taken lightly by most parties. This negative attitude has indirectly created the abuse either physically or mentally. Their right to receive and contribute to society is not achievable in the absence of good conscience and acceptance from the community. Hence, the objective of this study is to assess the level of public awareness of the rights of the disabled. This study is a quantitative study and data obtained through the survey. Respondents were selected using group sampling method and consisted of 496 people from various levels of society. The findings show that the level of public awareness about PWDs is moderately positive. The findings also show that the media are less successful in playing a role in providing information about the disability to the community. Through the findings of this study, it can be concluded that, the delivery of good information about PWD can create positive awareness among the people about the group. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will provide inputs and benefits the awareness of disabled people and to ensure the acceptance of those groups in society.*

Keywords - Awareness, PWD, disability rights, communication, media

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### Introduction

The World Bank estimates that people with disabilities are one-fifth of the world's poorest (World Bank, 2011). Poverty amongst the disabled is due to isolation and marginalization of them by the surrounding community. This situation has constrained the PWD's opportunity to participate in economic activities that can improve their quality of life. Discrimination and marginalization of the PWD are believed to result from an environmental barrier that has restrained the disabled from access to full educational opportunities.

This research gap exists as a result of the lack of authentic knowledge of the community on the media's function as disseminator of information on the rights of the disabled, thereby indirectly exacerbating the process of understanding, assessing and formulating behavior in society towards the disabled. As such, this article relates the role and contribution of the media to the development of minority communities such as the PWD in ensuring their equal rights and opportunities are fully involved in societies are assured. Indeed, PWD plays an important role in achieving the country's vision and aspirations. This study was set up to help eliminate discrimination against the disabled due to its inability and educate and raise public awareness on the rights of the disabled through the media.

On this awareness, various campaigns addressing the issue of equal rights of PWDs have been implemented by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the attitude of the people who underestimate or disregard the fate of the PWD is deeply regretted.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### PWD in society

Generally, the attitude towards the PWD is positive. According to Denison (2000), the people of Malaysia are beginning to pay attention to the PWD and this shows that the positive indicator of this PWD is not set aside towards the vision of 2020. The study of Shaharuddin (1976) shows that the attitude of the Malaysian society has changed. Communities can accept blind people to do jobs in the field of open employment. The attitude of the non-negative society before independence, the understanding of mutual understanding and mutual assistance shown by their colleagues during and after work.

Zainuddin (2004) generally thinks that the community plays a role in improving the careers of the disabled so that they can live independently. The role is based on the community's position and function such as changing the negative perception of the people towards the disabled, enhancing the systems and practices implemented involving special needs (PWD) careers and enhancing support and cooperation to those with special needs in ensuring their employment.

From the aspect of employer, Rahimah Mohd Noh (2010) is of the opinion that there are still employers who have low regard for the disabled. This study is in line with JTKSM which states that the main problem faced in the employment of disabled persons is the attitude of employers who are not interested, lacking trust and refuses to provide appropriate infrastructure for disabled persons. Employers generally have a stereotypical view of the disabled. They regard the disabled as they are often ill and need a lot of spending (Drummond & Ryn, 1995) in Rohany (2003).

Lee & White (2006) who writes articles in the Asia and Pacific Journal on Disability, states that most PWD women are also unacceptable in their work and the cause factor is identification, self-reliance and prejudice in recovery. For the identification factor, disabled women are not accepted in the job due to having a less attractive appearance and unable to meet the required criteria. Meanwhile, disabled women should not be self-reliant and expect help and assistance from others (Morris & Jenny, 1995) and prejudice in recovery, indicating that disabled women are not the priorities to be given in the rehabilitation program and they are considered less important (Rehabilitation International, 1980).

One of the more compulsory institutions is the hospital. This is because the hospital is one of the earliest mechanisms of empowerment for PWD. Their contribution and role in determining the category of PWD and defect detection is urgently needed. But most practitioners are putting biology solely as a fundamental basis for understanding this issue. Ultimately, average medical practitioners put their own perceptions on the term defect. There are hidden myths that sneak in the minds of Malaysian practitioners, such as disabled people can be passed through marriage and also link other diseases brought together (Rosli Ibrahim 2015).

He added that when dealing with social bias usually causes a person to be trapped in disproportionate and easy-to-divert people. As a result they are confined in self-conceit. That arrogance will later be developed as a prejudice wall as a separation between them and others.

### **Media and PWD**

As a result of lack of legal knowledge about the functioning of the mass media as a socio-cultural hobby and information on the common rights of the disabled, this has led to the difficulty in identifying the process of understanding, evaluating and formulating behavior among society. In other words, the information obtained is loose and not empirical. Therefore, this study is designed to help overcome the lack of information and knowledge of the community on equality among disabled persons in Malaysia from a media and community perspective.

Media plays an important role in providing information and influencing people's thinking, it takes into account the interests and policies set by the government. According to this assumption, the absence of information on various aspects will cause the community to fail to fulfill its obligations to issues of equal rights among disabled persons. Harold Lasswell (1948), a political scientist, proposed the development of an analytical model of media function that could guide the thinking of the matter. The media, according to him, provides monitoring of the surrounding environment and community component colleration in relation to the surroundings.

According to him again, the media should control, shape, and help the public to understand the world around them and act as a driving force for socialization. Therefore, this study is indirectly aimed at helping to overcome the lack of information and knowledge as well as to create a more sensitive society on current issues especially in dealing with issues of disability rights. Low level of awareness due to the lack of information disclosure in the mass media in the community about the rights of equality, is identified as a barrier to those groups to be fully engaged in society. In addition, there is a lack of statistical and detailed studies on the issue of PWD in Malaysia as well as the problems faced by them (Hasnah et.al, 2010).

Factors that can alter the negative attitude towards the PWD are information about this group and their direct relationship with them. More information is provided by the mass media about the people who are known to the community, the negative stereotype of the disabled and the positive attitude towards the disabled (Katz, Haz & Bailey, 1988; Ibrahim & Herr, 1982). This enables the disabled to be granted and given all the means for them to live normally and independently. There are about RM2.2 billion allocation given by the government to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in the 2015 budget launch to meet their needs. RM1.2 billion is used for welfare and benefits to 110 thousand PWD. This shows how the Ministry is concerned about the welfare of this group and it should be treated just like ordinary people.

### **CULTIVATION THEORY**

The cultivation theory is a very popular theory in the 1970s and 1980s in the field of communication, especially television media. George Gerbner's founder of the theory looks at the relationship between TV viewing and the public's view of the world. According to Gerbner (1946) people who watch TV are experiencing fears of violence occurring in the real world. Gerbner and his friends found formation of fears caused by watching TV programs more than four hours or so. According to Severin & Tankard (2001), cultivation means teaching about worldview, rules and values in general.

The findings show that people who are watching TV provide answers beyond actual circumstances. Views or impressions of people watching TV are based on TV shows. Therefore their views are grown from their exposure to TV. Gerbner sums up the mass media to form or embed in the community that depicted on TV is a real world picture. This proves that media has a strong influence on society. Hence, this study aims to assess the level of public awareness on issues of equality of the disabled through media influence.

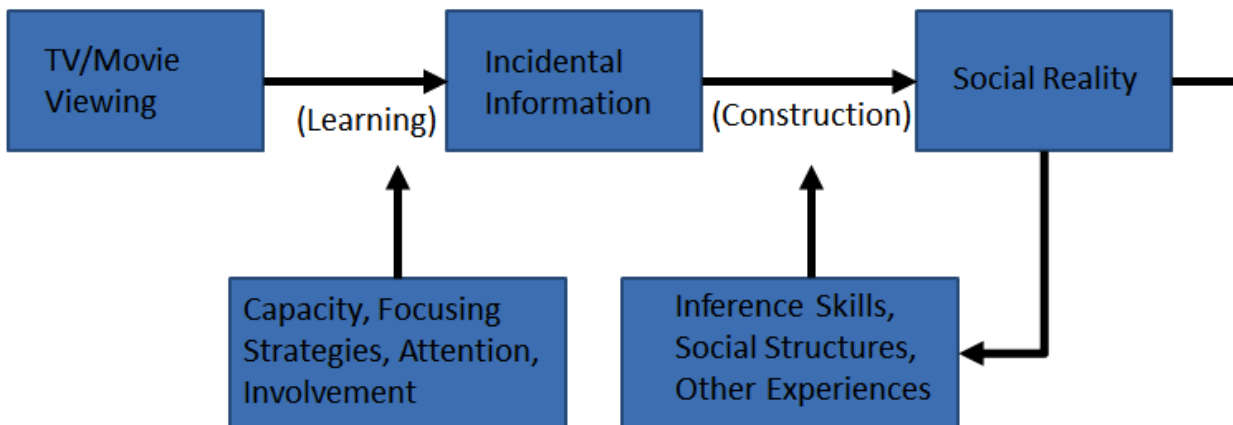


Figure 1: Early Model of Cultivation Theory by Hawkins & Pingree 1980

**METHODOLOGY**

In this study, the researcher have chosen to apply quantitative methods in the form of survey. Data collection has been conducted for 2 months in five areas around Klang Valley. During that period, 496 out of 500 civilians from 5 locations around the Klang Valley which are Kajang, Putrajaya, Selayang, Shah Alam and Kuala Lumpur were collected. In this study the group sampling method was used to represent the 5 affected areas. The results and outcomes of this survey questionnaire were analyzed using percentage descriptive statistic and frequency through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

**STUDY SURVEY QUESTIONS**

The questionnaire is comprised of four main sections namely; Part A: Respondent Demographics, Part B: Resources on Disabled People, Part C: Media as Social Awareness Tools and Part D: Awareness. Part A consists of 10 items involving demographic factors. Part B contains 6 item questions about the dissemination of information broken down into several dimensions, for example frequency and media usage. Section C contains 13 items divided into two dimensions namely information delivery and education. It is used to assess the level of understanding of the community and the effectiveness of the function is played in mass media. While section D contains 19 items consisting of three dimension namely reading, NGOs and environmental individuals. This is intended to be used to assess the level of awareness and tendency of the driving factor in affecting the public's awareness. Cronbach alpha reliability index for the entire 70 items studied was 0.895. The Cronbach Alpha value of this questionnaire instrument shows that the level of reliability is high and appropriate for this study.

**RESULTS**

**Demographic Information**

A total of 496 respondents were involved in this study as given in Table 1. In this study, female respondents recorded higher margins than male respondents 27.4% of 136 persons. While respondents involved in this study were aged below 25 years to 34 years respectively (51.8%) the equality 257 persons and (25.6%) were 127 persons. The rest, (14.3%) 71 people are between 35-45 years old while (8.3%) 41 people within 45 years and above. In terms of marital status, 61.7% (306) more married couples than 36.5% (181) and from other categories of 1.8% (9).

For respondents working in the public sector, 24.4% (121), followed by 23.8% (118) private sector respondents, self employed 6.9% (34), unemployed 3.2% (16) And the balance is 1.4% (7) from non-governmental organizations and 1.4% (7) employees. The composition of the respondents' work in this study shows a variety of variations. The findings of this study were due to the fact that most students were sensitive to their environment, especially those with disabilities. Here proves that students are more likely to face disabilities than others.

While the distribution of respondents according to the level of education and attitudes highlighted to the disabled. Respondents with advanced degrees / diplomas are 45.8% (227). While respondents with SPM are 24% (119), followed by STPM / Diploma 23.8% (118), 3.8% (19) and PMR 2.6% (13). In summary, highly educated groups responded in this study. This gives advantages to researchers as educated respondents are more susceptible to the awareness of a particular business, especially those related to the rights of the disabled in society.

Table 1 Respondents of Research

Item	N	Frequency (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Man	180	36.3
Women	316	63.7
<b>Age</b>		
<25 years old	257	51.8
25-34 years old	127	25.6
35-45 years old	71	14.3
>45 years old	41	8.3
<b>Marriage Status</b>		
Married	181	36.5
Single	306	61.7
Others	9	1.8
<b>Education</b>		
Degree/Advanced Degree	227	45.8
STPM/Diploma	118	23.8
SPM	119	24.0
PMR	13	2.6
Others	19	3.8
<b>Jobs</b>		
Public Sector	121	24.4
Private Sector	118	23.8
Non-government organization	7	1.4
Self-employed	34	6.9
Not working	16	3.2
Students	193	38.9
Others	7	1.4

#### Attitudes and Views on PWDs

Feedback from the collected questionnaire shows that the average acceptance of the attitude towards the disabled is that the respondents who respond only generally know the highest number ie 81.3% (403), followed by the deeper knowledge of 14.7% (73) People and respondents who did not know about it were 4.0% (20) people. This shows that respondents showed a bit of their sensitivity to the disabled but may not have enough knowledge about them. Table 2 below contains respondents' responses to their attitude towards the PWD.

Table 2 Attitudes towards PWD

Item	N	Frequency (%)
<b>Attitude towards the PWD</b>		
Do not know at all	20	4.0
Just to know in general	403	81.3
Know deeply	73	14.7

**Level of Awareness of the People on the Rights Issue of PWD**

The results were analyzed based on mean score and standard deviation. A total of 496 out of 500 people have been respondents in this study. The average number of readings is 4.23 (S.P. = 1.26). In addition, the results showed that the average for individual environmental category was 5.14 (S.P. = 1.29) whereas for NGOs category the mean value was 4.65 (S.P = 1.31). If further examined, the reading effect is lower than the role of NGOs and the individual environment that has the highest level of influence in this finding. In its interpretation, it can be said that the mean value of the whole level of awareness level on the issue of Equality of Rights among the PWD is at moderate level.

Table 3 Average Mean Value for The Level of Community Awareness on the Issues of Equality of the Disabled

Variable	Mean	S.P.
Reading	4.23	1.26
Individual Environment	5.14	1.29
NGO Organization	4.65	1.31

**DISCUSSION**

The independent variable factors affecting the level of public awareness on issues of equal rights among Persons with Disabilities (PWD). Individual environment factor is a factor that affects the level of public awareness of the disabled. This is because the findings show that the average of the individual environmental category is 5.14 (S.P. = 1.29) whereas for the reading category is 4.23 (S.P. = 1.26) and the role of NGOs is the mean value of 4.65 (S.P = 1.31). When examined in more detail, the three influences carry a modest high mean value. The average community thinks the influence of the surroundings helps to indirectly inform them.

According to Aziz (2000), environmental exposure and awareness are crucial to triggering the aspirations and inclinations of an issue in society. This is supported by the study of Siti Muharyani (2006) which found that the success of awareness in the community actually has a positive effect on the behavior of the disabled which includes aspects of self confidence, self-esteem, courage, responsibility, discipline, discipline and excitement. In addition, government and private support for their needs is part of the factors that drive the success of the disabled individual (Miller 1983; Nor Aishah 2002).

Important factors that influence consciousness are motivational, cultural, and environmental factors (Nenninger, 1988). With the dissemination of information and knowledge enhancement, indirectly create awareness in society.

The combined effect of knowledge, experience and observations on the impacts that have been and has been happening around them will implicate on the awareness of information. The findings of Dispoto (1977) and Hammet (1984) show that cognitive factors through the learning process information through the environment will create positive values in society.

Supported by the submission of Rosli Ibrahim (2015) in his book titled *Gelap Mata Percikan Renungan Seorang OKU Penglihatan* deals with the rights and sympathy of the PWD in society. According to him, it is commonplace that someone who looks at the PWD will issue sympathy. It cannot be avoided because of the original nature of man itself which is always highlighted in physical forms. But this can only appear in private space. When sympathy wants to be used as a social policy of society, it is very confusing.

This is supported by the findings of the survey that respondents who respond only generally know about PWD are the highest among them (81.3%) 403 people, followed by deep knowledge of representing (14.7%) 73 people and respondents who do not know (4.0%) 20 people. This shows that the average respondents showed a little bit of their sensitivity to the disabled. It can therefore be concluded that the average Malaysian society only takes into account the issues related to the disabled in the mass media in general and most of them are highly educated.

Hardeep & Andrea (2004) in his study found that "much of the discomfort people feel about disability may stem from a lack of understanding. Not enough people know a disabled person - almost half (43%) of the British public say they do not know anyone who is disabled - and many are concerned that they will do or say the wrong thing when talking to disabled people or about disability."

Through this finding, researchers see the media as information distributors and educators have a low inclination in being a nurturing agent in the community on issues of equal rights of PWD. In reality, people are aware of the existence of the disabled and the issues surrounding their lives. However, to give full involvement, convergence and implementation of this issue requires a high degree of solicitude from the community. Through this study, the average community felt that this issue had no interest in their lives except those with disability family members and employers employing the disabled. Therefore, the community will be more focused on sympathy for this group.

**IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF STUDIES**

This study was conducted with a quantitative approach to 496 respondents consisting of civilians living in five areas in the Klang Valley. The findings show that the attitude of society towards the issue of equal rights among PWD persons remains at a moderate level and requires more awareness from the community. The attitude of the people who underestimate or disregard the fate of the disabled is greatly regretted. Although, the campaign made by the Malaysian Government is to educate, inform and

educate Malaysians. But not all campaigns are successful and effective. Researchers also argue that qualitative studies such as in-depth interviews can be carried out in the future to get a more rewarding study result. Media needs to play a big role in disseminating information on issues of equal rights among disabled people to the community. In addition, the cooperation of all parties are needed so prejudice view of these groups can be prevented from all walks of life. The contribution of this study is expected to give a clear picture of the awareness that must be nurtured in the community and the media towards the PWD and help the people to contribute to the nation's development.

The implication of this study can be seen that the low level of awareness on issues of equal rights of the PWD through the role of the media causes respondents in less inclined to take notice or being neutral in addressing issues of equal rights of the PWD. Instead they choose to be prejudiced, stereotyped and discriminated without attempting to dispute the conveyed message. Basically, the findings do not support the opinion stating that educating functions have an effective sequencing effect as opposed to the function of information delivery. This study, on the other hand, illustrates the likelihood of effective information delivery strategies by using reading elements, NGOs and individual environment as well as a strong NGO role in providing awareness information to have a positive impact on influencing the audience in Malaysia.

Whereas, the implications of the Cultivation Theory approach should also be considered in an effort to increase the level of understanding and awareness of the general public about the information of the PWD through the media institutions. This is because not all societies have a high level of involvement, concentration and sensitivity to the issue of the PWD, in addition the issue does not occur in their environment. Therefore, the ability of the community to understand information that is channeled through media institutions may differ. Here the role of the media and NGOs is crucial in disseminating information and expositions on issues of equal rights among PWD in Malaysia to the community.

In this matter, the mass media plays an important role in channeling information to the people about equal rights among PWD. In addition, the choice of information delivery channels using information technology also plays an important role in ensuring that messages or information on the rights of the PWD is effectively communicated to the audience (Abdullah Sanusi Ahmad 1980). Media usage is one of the channels that can be considered as strategic and appropriate to convey information on issues of rights abuse among PWD in Malaysia.

This clearly indicates the important role played by media institutions in disseminating information on equal rights among PWD. In addition to the strategic channel selection, the information presented must be accurate and easy to understand. This is important as the opinion of society is one of the elements that play an important role in influencing the formation of basic or the right of the PWD in society.

Through the findings of this study, suggestions, representations and awareness on certain media organizations can be used to strengthen the information delivery system to attract more people aware of the role of the PWD in society. At least the PWD should not be considered silent and regarded as a minority group that should be set aside. In addition, this study can help media publishers in delivering a high-quality information which meet the target audiences and fulfill the current needs. Finally, it is proposed that future studies focus on diversifying data collection methods such as document analysis and focus group interviews to collect data and obtain different perspectives on the issue of PWD and the extent to which this issue can be addressed.

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