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# HUMAN AGENCY, POWER, AND DISCOURSE: ACCOMPLISHING FARM WORK THROUGH SHORT MESSAGING SERVICE (SMS) IN THE PHILIPPINES

Ronan Guanzon Zagado

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how rice farmers accomplish their farm work using short messaging service (SMS) technology in the Philippines. Currently, sixty percent of rice-farming households in the country use mobile phones, mainly for SMSing. Analysis draws on empirical data to reveal the relationship between new media and agriculture using the Farmers' Text Centre in the Philippines as a case study. The analysis uses a social constructivist framework as its interpretive lens.

Results of the study indicate SMSing is central to the accomplishment of farm work. The analysis further reveals that this particular use of SMS in agriculture must take into account the interplay of human agency, power, and discourse. SMSing is found to be constituted and operating not solely according to its technical logic but by the dynamic interplay of the people involved (human agency), their will to achieve outcomes (power), and the system that governs their interaction (discourse). SMSing is seen here as a reflexive phenomenon in that it comes about through a complex process of structuration.

Three areas were identified where the reflexive nature of SMSing has become manifest. These are: rice cropping, knowledge production, and farmer's everyday life. Rice cropping is no longer linked to, and affected by, the local conditions per se but also by social influences from faraway. This temporally and spatially differentiated condition has ushered in new means and structure of accomplishing farm work. SMSing offers farmers an alternative platform that allows efficient farm work all year round at all stages of rice cropping. The technology is

particularly found to be useful in addressing ‘contingent’ issues occurring on the farm. Moreover, analysis also reveals that SMSing has allowed farmers to have access to a ‘negotiated’ knowledge rather than a standard scientific recommendation vis-à-vis the solution to their farm issues. The term ‘negotiated’ implies that farmers are actively involved in knowledge production via SMSing. ‘Textholder’ is coined in this thesis to describe farmers and agricultural specialists as co-creators of knowledge in SMSing, as opposed to their traditional role as knowledge generator and user respectively. Lastly, it was discovered that SMSing is embedded in the everyday life of the farming community as a new form of social action in terms of community and household relations. The household relationship of farmers, their children, and spouse in relation to SMS use has been particularly instrumental in the accomplishment of farmers’ farm work.

In conclusion, agricultural extension is a system intended to facilitate the delivery of innovations to improve farmers’ farm productivity. From the analysis, implications are identified for how agricultural extension can be enhanced and become more relevant to the current highly mediated Filipino way of life. Finally, this thesis offers a set of recommendations on how to fully optimize the potentials of SMSing in agricultural extension.

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RONAN GUANZON ZAGADO

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| AFMA | - | Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act |
| BAS | - | Bureau of Agricultural Statistics |
| CMPCI | - | Cruzian Multipurpose Cooperative, Inc. |
| CY | - | Cropping Year |
| DA | - | Department of Agriculture |
| DAS | - | Days After Seeding |
| DBS | - | Days Before Seeding |
| DA-AMAS | - | Department of Agriculture - Agribusiness and Marketing Assistance Service |
| FGD | - | Focus Group Discussion |
| FTC | - | Farmers' Text Centre |
| ICT | - | Information and Communication Technologies |
| ISU | - | Isabela State University |
| LCC | - | Leaf Color Chart |
| MOET | - | Minus-One Element Technique |
| NEDA | - | National Economic and Development Authority |
| SMS | - | Short Messaging Service |
| OpAPA | - | Open Academy for Philippine Agriculture |
| PAC | - | Pampanga Agricultural College |
| PhilRice | - | Philippine Rice Research Institute |
| PSB | - | Philippine Seedboard |
| PSB Rc | - | Philippine Seedboard Rice |
| SOA | - | School On the Air |
| AUD | - | Australian Dollar |