

***Kulkul* in Global Era of Communication Advancement**

Ida Bagus Brata^{1✉} & Ida Bagus Nyoman Mantra²

¹²Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar

✉ Jalan Kamboja 11 A, Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia-80233

E-mail: ibbrata@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Communication is a form of interaction between the communicator and the communicant, requiring certain media in order for the message to be conveyed well. *Kulkul* as a communication medium has a significant role and several functions as a means to unite the community. For the people of Bali, *kulkul* has a high spirit of togetherness. Every time the sound of *kulkul* is heard, the residents will be present at the place previously agreed upon. With the power of its sound, *kulkul* is able to create unwritten rules. It is obeyed by all members of the community. It does not matter whether they are officials, farmers, caste people or ordinary people, all of them have to gather when they hear *kulkul*. This is because the sound of *kulkul* is a significant order that must be obeyed by the members of the community. The development and advancement of information and communication technologies in various forms of digital media, which make all activities more effective and efficient cause *kulkul* function as a traditional communication medium in an intense pressure from electronic media. *Kulkul* as traditional communication medium for the Balinese is deemed to be able to bridge the communication among the Balinese.

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INTRODUCTION

Human beings are created as multidimensional creatures. They have the intelligence to think, the ability to interact personally and socially, that have spiritual capabilities; therefore, human beings are referred to as unique creatures. By nature, as social beings, human beings are incapable of living alone, both physically and in the socio-cultural context. In the socio-cultural context, human beings always need other people to do collaboration in fulfilling their needs. To complete all the needs, people build their social interaction or communication actions with one another. Communication is a prime necessity for human beings in carrying out their life harmoniously (Webster, 2005).

Communication is a symbolic activity that is the activity to communicate uses meaningful symbols, carried out both verbally and nonverbally. Human beings really realize that all their needs can be met only if they communicate with others. People always engage in communication, because they find it impossible to live without communicating (Kumar, 2013). Communication is actually a process of exchanging information, ideas, and feelings is conveyed not only through verbal modality but also through written one, as well as through body language, style or self-expression, or artifacts (Bala, 2014).

Information technology and communication have encouraged people to develop increasingly complex relationships. Moreover, Oktarini (2017) describes that communication process may in questions and answer sequences in multi-party conversations. Communication development has progressed very rapidly because it is supported by technology. Information and communication technology bring our world closer in unity (Webster, 2005; Kumar, 2013). Marshall Mc Luhan calls our current world a *global village* because the technology keeps us communicative in our own culture and encouraged us to develop increasingly complex social relations. In this regard, globalization is defined as an internationalization process of cultural values of life from one cultural space to another cultural space.

In essence, communication is a form of interaction that occurs between the communicator and the communicant so that information is received more quickly. Therefore, communication medium is required (Bala, 2014). In the past, people had a very simple communication via traditional communication media, such as a drum, bells, *kulkul* in some areas, commonly called *kentongan* (wooden bell). Along with the development of technology, in fact, the communication system began to come due to and the effect of information technology and modern communications. The emergence of the internet-based computer becomes the starting point of the power of human interaction, in which communication can be done anytime and anywhere (Pemayun & Swabawa, 2014). Having high pressure from the use of modern technology, *Kulkul* remains important as a communication medium in all religious ceremony in Bali. It can gather people to gather immediately for a number of collective reasons (Antara, 2015; Saraswati, 2006)

Communication is an essential process for people to convey their thoughts or feelings. Thoughts can include ideas, information, opinions, and others. The feeling can be faith, certainty, doubt, worries and so forth that arise from the heart (Uchyana, 2000). Therefore, the scope of communication includes questions relating to the substance of the social interaction of the people in the community, which is carried out directly or by using communication media (Bala, 2014). In order that the message can be received well, the role of media in communication cannot be ignored. The media used as a means of communication constantly change following the developments of technology and lifestyle. Communication is fundamental for the survival of human life. Moreover, Astuti (2016) affirmed that Bali as a main tourist destination in Indonesia requires highly conducive social stability, therefore communication is really needed by all community members.

Communication is absolutely necessary to build relationships in everyday life. *Kulkul* is a sound instrument that is used as a Balinese traditional communication medium and placed on the high tower called *Bale*

Kulkul. *Bale kulkul* is not merely for a place of *kulkul* but it also gives character effect towards the temple building and community hall building (Saraswati, 2006). Through the "*pasuara kulkul*" *banjar* or *pakraman* community members can establish communications to reach all the people in the *banjar* or *pakraman* community. This indicates that *kulkul* as a traditional communication medium is still highly usable for the Balinese community especially in getting together for religious and customary activities (Antara, 2015; Saraswati, 2006).

In social dimension, the initial action of the alignment of the social functions and the needs of mankind begins with a social interaction or communication actions of each other. Activities of social interaction and communication actions are carried out both verbally, non-verbally or symbolically. Though people already have verbal language, a verbal language is not strong enough to describe the various concepts that exist in a common life in society, and hence the support of messages conveyed via signs or nonverbal symbols is needed. *Kulkul* is still widely used in Bali although its existence has been threatened by the development of modern communication media (Gelgel, 2015; Udayana, Sukardja, & Pandtja, 2017).

Electronic culture allows the dissemination of ideas without space, time and the use of the print media. Liliweri (2007: 150) suggests that some of the electronic cultural characteristics are as follows: 1) sharing information very quickly; 2) the multiplication process and a lot of copy can be obtained in a simple way; 3) one copy accessible to many people; 4) The new lesson is now called linear reading; 5) there is a kind of consensus for long periods, but with a more balanced participation; 6) pressing the status and social order through certain signs; 7) etiquette is not too Stringent so you can always expand the norms that are exchanged; 8) real-time collaborative work, 9) communication can divide the cultural aspects of oral and written; 10) contribution to the renewal and utilization of the new organization; 11) special tools required as a condition for participation; 12) there has been a verbal message enrichment.

It is no doubt that modern communication technology is also useful for the Balinese community. As a matter of fact, almost all Balinese are familiar with modern communication systems. However, the use of *kulkul* as a medium of communication is still an effective way of gathering people to the Banjar hall or to the temple building. This phenomenon is certainly very interesting to be investigated thoroughly to reveal the existence of *kulkul* and its functions in the community.

METHODS

This study aims at investigating the existence and function of *Kulkul* as a traditional medium of communication in Bali in this millennium era where electronic communication becomes phenomenal ways of communication among the community. In-depth interviews were undertaken with selected Balinese leaders in several villages. Direct observations were also conducted to gather the real use of *kulkul* in nominated villages. The data of the interviews were triangulated with the data obtained from direct observation. This was done to establish valid and reliable findings of the functions of *Kulkul* in the society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Kulkul is made from wood or bamboo. *Kulkul* is made from a piece of wood or bamboo, the length is a half a meter to two meters or as needed. *Kulkul* is round elongated. An elongated hole was made alongside of the wood or bamboo, and this part is the voice-box that serves as a resonator and both ends of the wood remain closed. The type of wood that can be used to make *kulkul* such as *Ketewel* (jackfruit) wood, *Teges* (teak) wood, *camplung* wood, yellowish *intaran* (old pandanus trees) wood. To get a better sound quality then *kulkul* must be made from a good material. The best wood used as a *kulkul* is jackfruit wood because Jackfruit wood fibers are denser than those of other types of wood.

Wood is chosen as the main material of *kulkul* because in Balinese wood (*kayu*) means thought. Making *kulkul* from the wood into a sound instrument is sacred and hallowed, demanding a long process. From the selection of materials and determination, logging or cutting of materials up to the manufacturing process, and then a series of ceremonies should be conducted. In making *kulkul* a highly regarded term is "*ayuning dewasa*", e.g. the calculation of the good or less good day to make *kulkul*. After *kulkul* is completed, a ceremony "*pemelapasan*" *kulkul* will be held. The ceremony is meaningful to give magical powers in order that *kulkul* is seen as valuable sacred objects. Furthermore, *kulkul* will be placed in a building called "*bale kulkul*".



Picture 1. *Kulkul* building in front of temple building



Picture 2. *Kulkul* building in the first courtyard of a Balinese temple

The existence of *Kulkul* in Balinese society is significant. Functionally *kulkul* symbolizes a means to promote togetherness and unity, because every community member will comply with sound symbols produced by *kulkul*. The meaning of *kulkul* sound is really an unwritten agreement delivered through "*pasuara kulkul*". Therefore, every *kulkul* being sounded without any command, community members will come because people have known what the meaning of *kulkul* sound. On that basis, the *kulkul* is not just a sound of an instrument but a cultural symbol that has been institutionalized in the lives of the people of Bali.

When *kulkul* is sounded, community members present, it indicates compliance with the rules of *banjar* or *pakraman*, because *kulkul* sound indicates the principle of togetherness and being a family. It implies a value of encouraging a spirit of mutual cooperation. *Kulkul* sounds contain symbols that can create paradigmatic relationship patterns that can trigger every community member to the awareness of what is seen, heard, and felt that they attribute to signs that are not visible. This means that when people heard the sound of *kulkul* then immediately their imagination will be directed to a values system that is the spirit of togetherness, unity, ethnicity, locality and the identity of a particular community.

In the past, *kulkul* had a strategic role, as a multi-functional means of communication, such as a vehicle for the delivery of important news or announcements, as a marker of time, and even functioned as an alarm. *Kulkul* can be used to gather the masses, the people who hear the *kulkul* sound to gather at the place of the *kulkul* sound to listen to the news or important announcements with regard to their lives. Even nowadays *kulkul* still can bring people to *Banjar* hall immediately in a very big crowd. It seems that *kulkul* is much more effective than modern electronic communication systems.



Picture 3. A long hole of Kukul



Picture 4. A round shape of Kukul

Kukul, as shown in the picture above, is a typical simple form of *kukul* made from a long, rounded wood and a long hole on one side is made to create a different sound when it is struck by a wooden stick. This kind of wooden bell has meaningful usability for the Balinese. It is not just a wooden bell sound produced by *kukul*. There are a number of sound differences which represent different meanings.

Based on the interviews with Balinese leaders and spiritual people in Bali, here is a briefly summary of the function of *kukul*. (1) Signs of regular meetings. On each communion, in Bali people usually meet at least once a month. Ahead of the meeting *kukul* is always sounded, producing its thundering sound to all corners of the *banjar* or *Pakraman*. *Kukul* sound is a call to all *banjar* members to immediately gather in a place that has been agreed, (2) Signs of labor mobilization. In addition, the sound of *kukul* also implies exertion, either already planned or of sudden nature. Planned activities include *ngayah* (working without any payment) to prepare a ceremony at a temple. Exertion system here begins by sounding *kukul*, which function to call the community members to immediately gather to prepare *ngayah* to prepare a ceremony. (3) Signs of natural phenomena. *Kukul* sound often also is used as a sign of natural phenomena, such as when there is an eclipse of the moon, earth quake, land slide, fire, high flood, etc. In this regard, usually, *kukul* is sounded with a fast rhythm, loud, and longer known as "*kukul bulus*". Such sound of *kukul* is a sign that residents should come soon and get ready to anticipate all possibilities that may happen.

Balinese life is getting more modern and they are also more advanced in using modern communication technology. People are familiar with mobile phone applications and they use them in various communications both for business and social purposes. However, *kukul* is still widely used as a medium of communication especially during the customary and religious events. In line with the dynamic life of Balinese, there are four types of *kukul* communication signals popularly used by the people of Bali, such as *Kukul Dewa*, *Kukul bhuta*, *Kukul Manusa*, *kukul hiasan*.

The first type is *Kukul Dewa*. It is used by the Balinese when performing the ceremony for the God called *Dewa Yadnya*. *Kukul Dewa* is categorized as a sacred *kukul*, and is always placed in temples. *Kukul* cannot be separated from *temple ceremony*, because it functions as a part of ceremonies. In the guidelines for ceremony implementation in Bali, it is mentioned that there should be a ceremony called *panca gita*. *Panca* means five, *gita* means song. *Panca gita* includes *kukul* sound, the noise of *genta/bajra* of holly man/priest, the sound of hymns (songs of praise to God), *Sunari* sound (bamboo propeller), and the sound of gamelan. *Kukul Dewa* is sounded as a sign that the ceremony in the temple has been started, to call God or as a mark of the coming of God in the temple related to the various activities of the procession, like *lunga kepesiraman* (to holy baths), *memasar* (to the market) etc. *Kukul* is sounded in a very slow rhythm with two tones, namely *tung . . . , tit . . .* and so forth.

The second type is *Kukul bhuta*. It is used during the ceremony *bhuta yadnya*. *Kukul bhuta* is sounded during the ceremony that serves to call the *bhuta kala* in order to neutralize the natural state of the universe to be safe and secure. *Kukul bhuta* in Balinese society is generally called *timplugan*. The Balinese believe that when *kukul timplugan* is sounded during the cleansing ceremony, all the bad spirits will disappear and

the area becomes free from the negative effects of a bad spirit. This type of ceremonial activity definitely can be replaced by modern technology.

The third type is *Kulkul Manusa*. It is used in connection with the activities carried out by customary community organizations such as Desa pakraman, customary banjar, Subak, and other organizations that exist in society. The Rhythm of *kulkul Manusa* for routine activity is slow and short, while for a sudden activity, such as fires, the sound is faster and longer called *kulkul bulus*. Because of the various distinctive sound of *kulkul manusia* in which each sound represents a different human phenomenon, then it is almost impossible to be replaced by modern communication technology. Additionally, modern technology does not have the effect of heart touching feeling for some old Balinese because of some misuse of its purpose.

The fourth type is *Kulkul hiasan*. As its name implies *kulkul hiasan*, this *kulkul* is given ornaments to add to its beauty of the building. Some houses in Bali are decorated with *kulkul* in order to beautify the family buildings. *Kulkul* can be used to uplift the character of Balinese architectures and create nuance of real Balinese. Some hotels nowadays are decorated with *kulkul* to create more Balinese appealing. Some people even put an offering on it so the God of *kulkul* guards the surrounding areas keeping them from bad spirits. This kind of beliefs and tradition certainly cannot be replaced by modern technology. Therefore, *kulkul* will always exist in Bali for long period of time and used as a medium of communication even there is a high pressure of use of modern technology.

The history of the development of modern communication cannot be separated from the advancement of information and communication technology itself. The role of digital media makes all the activities run effectively and efficiently. This means that nowadays the role of *kulkul* as a means of delivering information in some cases has been replaced by electronic communication equipment, in line with the vast information today causing human beings to become so dependent on electronic media. However, *Kulkul* is still used in all villages in Bali in which all villages in Bali have *kulkul*. The reason why the Balinese always comply with cultural symbols, such as the sound of *kulkul* itself is because *kulkul* is already in the heart of all Balinese and they respect the sound of *kulkul* more than the sound of the mobile phone. Therefore *Kulkul* in Bali is so unique and becomes a culture with distinctive symbolic significance compared with other regions in the archipelago.



Picture 6. Two different sizes of *kulkul* placed in one *kulkul* tower



Picture 7. Five different sizes of *kulkul* placed in one *kulkul* tower

Kulkul is held at a high tower in community hall so its sound can be heard by all member of the community. When *kulkul* is sounded, all members of the community come and gather in the community building near the *kulkul* tower to find out what they need to do. This indicates that *kulkul* is very useful for Balinese. It can bring a big crowd of Balinese in just a few seconds. This also means that *kulkul* is even more effective than modern communication systems which need to be seen by the receivers to know the message. Therefore, the use of *kulkul* is still significant among the Balinese community.

Kulkul as a communication medium is very different from the telegraph, telephones, televisions, mobile phones, fax, radio, internet, facebook, twitter, and others. *Kulkul* is one type of communication a tool of the past which has its own meaning and symbols. The symbol and meaning of *kulkul* are distinguished by its sound rhythm. The sound rhythm of *kulkul* has no basic standard because every community or every region has a different rhythm in accordance with the philosophy of "*desa kala patra*" or "*desa mawa cara*".

The influence of culture on a dynamic community causes a shift in the culture, and this will affect the mindset of people to accept the cultural heritage of its predecessor. With the advent of information and communication technology, *kulkul* is often viewed as a medium of communication that is outdated. But before the sophisticated modern communications were discovered, *kulkul* was one of the most powerful media of communication used by the people of Bali.

Kulkul in its various forms has functions and meaning as a cultural heritage of the past, a local identity that must be maintained and preserved by the people of Bali. Although today's information and communication technology are becoming more sophisticated, *kulkul* as a traditional communication medium is still being used by Balinese community, in line with the effort of Balinese people in maintaining, and preserving the customs and culture.

CONCLUSION

Kulkul is a traditional communication medium, which bridges the communication in Balinese society, between man and God, man and natural rulers, and between man and all men. *Kulkul* is a traditional communication medium for all Balinese community members. Through *kulkul* sound, it is believed that a sense of unity in the Balinese community life can be created. The *kulkul* sound can evoke a sense of social solidarity among the people of Bali. *Kulkul* as traditional communication medium is a form of the local wisdom of Bali, which can convey messages or symbols which are loaded with meaning that can be understood through the beat/rhythm which reflects the values of solidarity, social friendship, sense of unity and the togetherness of the entire Balinese community. The dynamics of culture and society have developed so rapidly, especially in the field of information and communication technology with the presence of a variety of new digital media, so that all activities run more effectively and efficiently, but the existence of *kulkul* as a traditional medium Bali still exists and will never be replaced as long as the Balinese hold on to their tradition and culture.

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